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HOLY CONFIDENCE;

OR,

SIMPLICITY WITH GOD.

TRANSLATED FROM A WORK OF

FATHER ROGACCI,

OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS,

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HOLY CONFIDENCE.

CHAPTER I.

God desires that we be at our ease with Him.

It is a wise saying of an ancient poet that love and majesty do not accord well together. A king who wishes his subjects to love him like children must have a father's tenderness as well as a ruler's dignity. If his authority is felt to be a burden, if they stand in awe of him, if they behave in his presence like obedient slaves, he may have respect and fear, but never confidence or love. History tells us of generals who were convinced of this truth, and being anxious to win the hearts of their soldiers, mixed with them most familiarly, discarding all tokens of their rank, and only taking care not to put themselves on a perfect equality with them. Cicero tells us that when Pompey appeared in public he made himself so popular that instead of taking him for a man superior even to princes, he might easily have been mistaken for a simple individual. And if this conduct is to be admired in some princes of a naturally winning exterior and

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amiable nature, how much more do we admire it in the great monarch of the whole universe. He is determined at all costs to gain our hearts and win our tender affection, and therefore He not only permits but ardently desires that, without forgetting the respect due to His majesty, we should use a loving familiarity with Him, as a friend with a friend, or as a son with the most indulgent father. And is it possible that this absolute master of the world could express this desire of His heart in a stronger or more persuasive way than He has done in all ages ?

If an earthly king were to lay aside all marks of royalty, dress like a poor man, go among his subjects without guards or attendants, sit down with them at table, go about with them, work with them, call them his companions and brothers, let them do the same to him, could he do more, or make himself more popular ?

And yet the King of Heaven manifested Himself to men in this manner eighteen centuries ago. O inconceivable wonder ! He hid His greatness under the poor garments of our mortality. He exchanged His throne for a cradle, His eternal palace first for a manger, then for a carpenter's cottage. He mixed with His subjects, conversed with them, travelled with them, sat down at their tables, calling them His brothers and His friends, and

allowed them to do the same. And this, not only for a few hours or days, but for thirty-three years. Was this enough condescension for us? No; for when He left the earth He took with Him that garment which He had worn amongst us, took it into His royal palace, and was not ashamed to display Himself thus clothed in the midst of His court. And even that was nothing in comparison of what He has yet done for us. We behold our loving King in the meanest spots, where He chooses to remain till the end of time that He may be always with us.

O wonderful marvel of condescension! If we judge by appearances He is no longer a man but a morsel of bread! He is no longer content with visiting His subjects in their dwellings, He comes into their breasts. Instead of sitting at their tables He gives Himself as their food; and even this is not enough for His love. For fear that the thought of His great majesty should frighten us or drive us away, He exhausts every expression that language contains in using words to attract us or put us at our ease.

Is it not He who says in the Book of Proverbs, "My delights are to be with the children of men?" Is it not He who promises by His prophet Isaias that nothing can efface us from His memory, "Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have had pity on the

son of her womb; and if she should forget yet will I not forget thee?" And to this declaration He adds the tender words, "You shall be carried at the breasts, and upon the knees they shall caress you; as one whom the mother caresseth so will I comfort you." Has He not again told us by the mouth of His beloved disciple that He will no longer call us *servants* (though indeed we are by nature nothing more), but dear friends; and further that He looks on us as His own children. "Behold," says the Evangelist, "What manner of charity the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called and should be the sons of God." In St. Matthew's Gospel He actually commands us to call Him Father: "Thus therefore shall ye pray, Our Father who art in heaven." And so great, says St. Cyprian, is this privilege that we should never have dared to use it if He had not bade us do so. And yet there is something more wonderful still. Not content with bidding us name Him *Father*, He would that we should call Him so with a simplicity and confidence like little children who can scarcely speak. Thus does the learned Theodoretus interpret St. Paul's words to the Romans:—"For you have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry Abba Father." Abba, he says, in the Syriac language does not mean

father, but rather an endearing epithet such as little children use. When then the Holy Spirit teaches us to call God our Father, His desire is, according to the Apostle, that we do so with the perfect ease and the sweet liberty of little children.

After so many marks of encouragement which so clearly show the desires of His heart, how is it that there are so many men who think they please Him better by a trembling submission than by a sweet and confiding liberty? As He considers us to be His friends and children, as He desires that we call Him by the sweet name of Father, there is no doubt that the familiarity which these titles inspire is the most pleasing to Him.

CHAPTER II.

His great majesty is no obstacle to this ease.

WHAT can be said against such convincing and persuasive reasons? There is but one objection, and I look on it as the strongest that can be made, that our familiarity with so great a king seems to lower, even to debase His august

majesty. Observe, they say to us, the masters of this world; they take care not to make themselves common in this way, or to put their subjects at ease with them; and if any one dares to take such a liberty they take care to reprove his audacity, and to reduce him to a suitable submission. It is said of Cæsar Augustus, that having supped with one of his subjects who had served him with remarkable parsimony, he said on leaving, I did not think you would have been so familiar. And a stronger proof was given in Septimus Severus. Before he was emperor he was sent as ambassador to Africa. There he met a poor man who had been his intimate friend, and who ran to meet him with open arms. Severus, indignant at this liberty, ordered him to be scourged, and proclaimed by a herald that plebians should treat the Roman deputies with more respect.

But the conduct of our God in His dealings with us is different from that of the rulers of this earth. If the latter are exacting to their inferiors, it is because their borrowed authority rests on a weak foundation and cannot be sustained without great respect from their subjects. The majesty of the King of Heaven, on the contrary, being infinite, and belonging to His very nature, can lower itself as much as He pleases without fear of its being lessened. "Although Jesus be my Lord and my King," says St. Teresa, "I can safely converse with

Him as with a friend, for I know that He resembles not those men whom we call our masters, whose power rests on exterior circumstances, and who are only great according to the estimation in which they are held. O King of Glory and Ruler of Rulers, Thy royalty rests not on such feeble foundations. Thou dost not need a brilliant court to assure us Thou art a king. The kings of the earth, having no personal distinction, would not be recognised for what they are if they went forth alone and without a crowd of guards and courtiers. Naturally on a level with their own subjects, it is these very subjects grouped round them which form their glory." It is so false that the greatness of God, which so far surpasses that of all His creatures, should be a reason for forbidding us familiarity with Him, this it is precisely which removes all danger from it, for according to the very just observation of Pliny, when a prince is raised to the highest degree of power, not only has he nothing to fear in condescending, but it will profit him certainly. Not being able to raise himself higher he must descend. Nothing is more favourable to greatness than humility. Thus we see that the officers of kings are more delicate and punctilious than their masters in regard of ceremony. The latter feel their own dignity too much to believe it can be despised, the former having but a borrowed greatness easily

persuade themselves that they are despised ; from thence it arises that the former glory in pardoning forgetfulness and rudeness, and the latter think it a dishonour not to revenge themselves ; thence it follows as a custom in the world, that one must be more attentive and more respectful towards courtiers than towards princes. Finally, who can doubt that God will be pleased with such a way of acting towards Him as renders our service perfect, and that it certainly does when it conduces to His glory or to our own good, for that is the service He expects from us, that is what He has in view in His government of the world and in all His works, and nothing helps us more to attain this double end than a happy and confiding service. It is love that He wants, and it is indeed what we need ourselves. In this love, and this love only, His glory and our happiness are united, and what can be more fitting to increase that love in our hearts than a liberty at once respectful and familiar.

CHAPTER III.

God desires His glory and our happiness, and it is by our confiding and familiar love that we can further both.

LET us insist on these two truths that we may be more convinced of them. First, that we may be certain our love for God is the only means of furthering His glory and our well-being, we must understand well what is the nature of love. What then is love? It is a sweet impulse of the heart towards the object of its love, the desire of being united to it. This impulsions towards happiness is so natural that we find it even in creatures without reason. All heavy bodies are drawn towards the centre of the earth, and tend towards it with all the strength of their nature. Throw a stone into the air, it will follow at first the movement you have given it, but when the propelling force is counteracted it will certainly gravitate towards the ground. In the same way when love takes possession of a soul it exercises such an empire over it, that it can neither rest in itself or in any other object than that which it loves. It is towards this object that it is continually tending as towards its centre, and towards it every movement is directed.

This idea in the mind makes St. Austin call love the *weight of the soul*, and he illustrates

his ideas thus :—"My weight is my love ; I must either fly from it or be drawn after it. The weight of a body is its affection ; it either follows or carries its weight, and my heart goes whither its love carries it." This point settled, it is clear we cannot serve our Creator better than by loving Him, and the best way of loving Him is to direct every motion of our hearts towards Him, and no one will do this so perfectly as he who loves this Being worthy of all devotion with a great and ardent love. And I quote from Hugh de St. Victor this just conclusion :—"To love God is to serve Him, so that he who loves Him serves Him, he who loves Him not serves Him not, he who loves Him little serves Him little, and he who loves Him much serves Him much." And in order to augment and increase this love so that every movement of the soul may tend towards God, and the soul herself to a perfect service, a filial confidence is of far greater use than a humble fear, a second truth which is not less certain or less evident than that which I have demonstrated. Who can really doubt that it is a quality of love to be willing to dwell with the object of its love ? It is certain we find more pleasure in intercourse with a friend with whom we are on familiar terms than with one for whom we feel only fear and respect. Do you suppose the attendants of an exacting and severe sovereign take much plea-

sure in being with him ? They will be attentive from duty and from interest, but not from pleasure. And, further, this kind of service is so painful to both body and mind this necessity of being always on our guard and controlling ourselves is such a violent strain on human liberty that people cannot bear it for any length of time. Those on the contrary who are fortunate enough to serve a kind and gracious king, who delights to put his subjects at their ease with him, can spend whole days in his company not only without weariness but with positive pleasure. If then a person never thinks of God except as that Being so infinitely great that in comparison with Him not only himself but the whole universe is a little contemptible atom, he will be terrified by His great majesty, and will fly from His presence instead of seeking it. It will be very different with one who is accustomed to look on his God as indeed infinitely great, but who is so infinitely and immensely good that He has adopted us as His children, though we were but nothing in His sight, and desires that we look on Him as our Father.

The more a Christian feels that God is great and worthy of veneration the more he is rejoiced in having Him as his friend and his father. The honour that he has received draws him irresistibly towards Him. Instead of being weary of His company he can pass whole days

with Him with inexpressible delight, and the time of prayer is a time of joy. St. Austin says in his manual:—"He who loves God draws near Him with confidence, speaks with familiarity, consults Him in everything. Love gives a holy liberty, liberty puts us at our ease, and ease gives us a relish." What need I say further? We cannot love any one without a certain amount of confidence in him. As St. Peter Chrysologus says:—"Where there is too much fear there is no room for love." Let us conclude then with St. Laurence Justinian:—"That God certainly prefers our love to our fear and is better pleased to see us draw near Him with joyful confidence and loving freedom than with timidity and servile submission." And also this is certainly the judgment of the great Apostle, as we may gather from those words in his Epistle to the Romans which I have already quoted:—"You have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption." And again in the Second Epistle to Timothy:—"God hath not given us the spirit of fear but of love."

CHAPTER IV.

Who are those who can be at ease with God ?

THERE is but one more point in this matter to examine, to know whether this freedom and familiarity, so pleasing to God and useful for ourselves, is fitting for everybody, or only for those who have already made great progress in perfection. And to my mind the best answer to this question is that it is suitable for all those who feel they are capable of it, and who have learnt by experience that they derive fruit from it. And here it is well to remark: 1st. That those are not capable of it who have but a slight knowledge of God, who think too much of themselves, and have an inordinate attachment to the good things of this world. For how with such impediments can a soul have a tender love for her God, and a familiarity with Him which this love supposes.

2nd. In order to derive fruit from this easy and familiar devotion, it needs a certain aptitude which is not possessed by everybody. If any one, for example, does not sufficiently know his own nothingness and unworthiness, if his conscience is still stained by some mortal sins, or if he has not a greater horror of falling into such than of any suffering of this present life, let him look on this familiarity as forbid-

den to him, otherwise the result will be that, instead of deriving advantage from this intimacy he will do himself real harm, he will have a vain esteem of self together with contempt of others, a great temerity in exposing himself to danger, and a want of respect for God, which will be displeasing to His great majesty ; for if friendship even among men must be, as Cicero says, accompanied by a certain veneration, how much more is it necessary when it concerns the Master of the Universe.

Every one who is free from mortal sin, who carefully tries to avoid venial faults, to purify his affections, to acquire the virtues that he needs, fully convinced that he is as nothing before God, and can do nothing without his help, can be at ease with his good Master. And in truth I can not see why the knowledge of our nothingness and the conviction of our miseries should prevent an intimacy which God desires, and the advantages of which we learn from experience. Some people say that the spirit of abnegation which Christian humility inspires, ought to lead us to refuse consolations and to neglect our own interests. In this case they are in error ; for if we admit this principle, it would follow that absence from Holy Communion would be a point of perfection—because Communion, as everybody knows, is the greatest consolation and help that religion can give, and at the same time

the token of the most familiar friendship we can imagine. And where is the theologian or the director who has ever thought of advising such a humility? They have always done the contrary, and in proof of it here is the opinion of St. Teresa, whose authority in the direction of souls is of great weight. "Let us take care not to mistake for humility that sort of delicacy in avoiding favours from God that some people advise, for certainly humility does not consist in refusing the gifts of our great King, but rather in looking on them as a gratuitous act of liberality. That I may receive a visit from the Master of the Universe, that He will come unto me to show me His goodness, to load me with His gifts, and that I from modesty shall not open my mouth, shall refuse to converse with Him, to receive His gifts! May God preserve you, my daughters, from this strange humility. Act on the contrary with Him, as with a father, a brother, a master, a spouse, remind Him of the rights your alliance with Him gives you, and say to Him with loving freedom that because He is your spouse you hope He will always treat you as such."

And further, if this new rule of humility was ever to gain ground, it would not be only the beginners and novices who ought to abstain from this sweet and confiding familiarity with God, and confine themselves to loving Him with a timid and servile submission, but those even

who have made progress, and those who are perfect ought to do so likewise. For they also ought to be humble, and consider themselves unworthy of heavenly favours. Here is my reasoning. In order that a soul be at ease with God, she must either be worthy of it, or it is sufficient that God sees it to be good that she should act thus, because though unworthy she will derive great fruit from it. If it is necessary that a soul be worthy of this familiarity in order to enjoy it, then it must be forbidden not only to all mankind but also to all the angels. If it is sufficient that God permits this liberty to poor mortals, then whoever knows by experience that it is really profitable to him, can use it not only without audacity or presumption, but also with a praiseworthy prudence. It stands to reason that there can be no contradiction between the respect we owe to God and our spiritual advancement, for, as says the Council of Ephesus, "Nothing that can contribute to the salvation of man can do injury to the Creator."

And then I say to my opponents, who would only allow this easy and familiar intercourse with God to men who have attained the most sublime perfection, why do you reserve this privilege to them only? Doubtless because you believe they only are capable of making use of it and worthy to use it. *They only are capable*, that is not the opinion of the masters of

spiritual life, and it seems to me that our Lord's attention was not given only to men who are eminent in virtue. *They alone are worthy*, but if this opinion were true, a very strange consequence would ensue. Everyone who wishes to act simply and lovingly with God, would have to say to himself, I have made great progress in perfection, and I am worthy of privileges from my Divine Master.

Do you think such a judgment would be free from arrogance? Certainly it would not be as humble or as modest as that of him who says, "My God is so great, and I am so little and contemptible, that I am not worthy to raise my eyes towards His throne, or to open my mouth to speak to Him, still less to call Him my Father, and to put myself at ease with Him as His child. If, however, as I know by experience, I profit greatly by this familiarity, and I also know that in His unspeakable goodness He permits me to take this liberty with Him, I am not sufficiently my own enemy to refuse His benefits." Who can tell me now that to reason in this way and to act accordingly is to fail in the humility and respect due to God? Who can tell me that this line of conduct does not befit a beginner as well as the perfect?

To make it clearer, let us apply what I have been saying to Communion; two Christians, judge themselves equally unworthy to receive

Holy Communion, but each pursues a different method ; one, despite his conviction of his unworthiness, receives Holy Communion every week as the great remedy for his miseries ; another, in order to receive more worthily, only ventures to Communion once a year ; which of the two do you deem the most humble ? Cassian tells us the former, and what he adds is worthy of being well weighed, “ If the sight of our sins tends to keep us away from daily Communion, the confidence of finding in it a remedy for all our evils ought to make us hunger for it, profoundly convinced that if we are unworthy of the favour the help is essential for us, otherwise I do not see who could communicate even once a year. And there are some who keep away and do themselves great harm ; the reason of their mistake is that they only look at the excellence of the Sacraments, then they think they must be holy before they approach them, instead of reflecting that it is the Sacraments which make the soul holy. Thus in trying to avoid pride they fall into it, because when at last they come to Communion they judge themselves worthy to participate.”

To return to our subject, beginners as well as the perfect can, without any presumption, make themselves at ease with God, provided that they guard themselves against the snares of the spirit of darkness. The means are as

follows. They must never lose sight of their own unworthiness, constantly remembering that they were drawn out of nothing by God, that they are of themselves incapable of doing any good, guilty of many sins, and inclined from the corruption of their hearts to commit still greater ones. They must consider that God has no need of them, but that they are in continual need of His grace, and that it is most perilous to free themselves from the obedience and submission due to Him. Let them be assured that though His goodness has gone so far as to receive them as friends and brothers, it is not His will that they should abuse this condescension, that they should let their familiarity degenerate into license, and use their liberty to offend Him; for then forgetting that they are His children He will punish them as His enemies, and deprive them for ever of heaven unless they sincerely repent. And it is not sufficient to consider all this at the beginning of a conversion, we should recall it from time to time. But with the exception of this exercise of necessary humility, our communications with God ought to be seasoned with happy and loving freedom; this ought to be as it were the *food* of the heart, while the preceding reflections are only medicines.

CHAPTER V.

The Lord is neither jealous of His greatness, nor subject to anger.

ST. CLEMENT of Alexandria, speaking of those people who paint God according to their own likeness, and give Him a black or brown countenance, according to whatever is their own colour, like the Ethiopians and the Thracians, adds, that those persons are still more foolish who invest Him with their instincts, affections, and manners. It is true that in some things man resembles God, but not in all. So great is the distance which separates them that, instead of imagining that He thinks and acts like men do, we may be sure it is far otherwise. But people have an idea that it is so, and insist upon it that this one and inimitable Being should act according to the fashion of poor human creatures ; and from this absurd idea springs forth a number of errors on many matters, and particularly on the subject we are considering. And I must confute them, because they prevent that filial liberty, that loving confidence, that sweet familiarity which is so advantageous to us and so pleasing to our God.

First, it is an error to suppose that the King

of Heaven is like the kings on this earth, always anxious to preserve His dignity. The monarchs of this world are wont to do all they can to inspire their people with fear and respect, and they show condescension only to the great nobles of their court. Such, then, they declare is the conduct of the King of kings. He would have His earthly subjects tremble, and be as nothing before His presence; and if He stoops from His greatness, it is only with the angels and saints who are in heaven. How little do they who speak thus know the Lord! Nothing can please Him less than this grandeur and pomp in which they clothe Him, because He desires not to be feared but loved; and as St. Peter Chrysologus has so well said, "It is not by power but by love that He desires to reign over His subjects."

I do not speak on this truth here, because I have done so in the preceding chapter. I will only add a passage of St. Teresa to complete what I have said on this subject. This passage is taken from her conceptions of divine love, and refers to the gross imaginations of some who took scandal at the loving expressions used by Solomon in the Cantic of Canticles. This great Saint, after having related an anecdote of a sermon on the love of God, in which the texts quoted from this divine book had amused the audience extremely, adds

that this stupid merriment arose, from these persons never having paid sufficient attention to the proofs which Jesus Christ gives us of His tenderness, either on Mount Calvary or in the Sacrament of the Altar—proofs much more striking than the words of Scripture; and he who understands them, instead of thinking the Canticle of Canticles exaggeration, will rather find that it falls short of the fervour of divine love. “I conclude, then,” says she at length, “that the most tender and passionate expressions in the holy writings should not surprise you; for what fills me with wonder and raises me above myself is to see that the love of Jesus for us is so great, that the most burning expressions cannot sufficiently set it forth, and that the facts exceed all that can be said. O my divine Jesus, we admire Thee in Thy sacred word; but Thy works are more admirable still, for do we not eat Thy divine flesh in the Eucharist?”

They are also in error who take literally some figurative expressions of Holy Writ about the anger of God, and who represent Him to themselves as a terrible Master, who has severity always in His eyes, reproaches and threats on His lips, and a thunderbolt in His hand, so that the very remembrance of Him is painful to them, and they close their hearts whenever they come before Him. Even when their conscience does not reproach them, and

they have no cause to fear His wrath, they still tremble before Him.

When the father of a family is violently angry with some enemy, his children and servants fly away in terror from his presence. And this is the idea that the Christians of whom I am speaking possess of their God.

It is true, they say, that we are not guilty of any grievous sin, but He is irritated by the numerous sins with which the earth is covered: He is condemning people in this place and that to perdition; how, then, can we draw near Him with confidence, and be at our ease with His terrible Majesty? No, you could not indeed, if it were really as you say; but I assure you that such an idea is both false and unworthy of so good a Master, and that a man with very little instruction will never fall into it. Each of us ought, then, to look on this idea of God as a lie, and to dispel it diligently from our minds. We should thoroughly persuade ourselves, on the contrary, that the Sovereign Lord of all things is neither agitated or troubled by the sins of His people; that when He threatens and punishes sinners, He does not do so with passion, after the manner of men, but with perfect calmness, and from pure love of justice—like unto laws, says Cicero, which, while they condemn wrongdoing, are guided by justice and not by anger. Therefore, if we wish to have a true idea of

our God, we must consider Him as a Being uninfluenced by human passions, incapable of any perturbation, and guided solely in His judgments by the inspirations of His justice, which is always equitable, pure, and universal. "I will not execute the fierceness of my wrath," He says to us by the mouth of His prophet, Osee, "because I am God and not man." And St. John, speaking of His throne, from which went out thunders and lightnings, shows Him to us surrounded by a rainbow, the symbol of serenity — evidently giving us to understand by this figure, that even when He pours forth reproaches and threats, or executes His justice, it has no effect upon His immutable peace.

There is certainly nothing more rare or more to be admired among men than a judge who inflicts with a quiet mind and heart undisturbed the punishment of the law on a criminal, or even a friend, saying to him: "I condemn you, my friend, because the law orders it, and I must obey it; but certainly, if I consulted my own heart, I should greatly prefer to send you away forgiven than to punishment; but as common justice exacts it, do not take it amiss that I comply with it, and believe indeed it is that, and not I, who condemn you, or, rather, it is yourself who have drawn down this misery on yourself." After this example, it is easy for each of us to understand how God can unite

the exercise of His strict justice, with His unalterable tenderness. This surely comes neither from anger or hatred ; and when people call it so, it is because men generally punish only from the impulse of their cruel passions. It is in this sense, says St. Austin, that we must interpret the words of Holy Writ, where the vengeance of God bears the name of fury and anger. It is in this sense only that we should understand that hatred of sinners, which David attributes to God, when he says: "Thou hatest all them that do iniquity."

We have the proof of this in the Book of Wisdom: "Thou lovest all things that are, and hatest none of the things that Thou hast made." Thus, then, God punishes sinners, as men punish when they are in anger or hatred ; but instead of doing it as they do, from passion, He does it from pure love *of the good*.

CHAPTER VI.

It is unjust to accuse God of severity.

THOSE who look on God as severe in His nature, rigorous in exacting what is due to Himself, and more inclined to justice than to mercy, are entirely mistaken. "What folly it

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is," says St. Bernard, "to call that most sensitive and compassionate Being grave and severe; that most merciful Being harsh and implacable; that most loving Being cruel and terrible. It is the wicked who thus speak, but they are deceived. The God which they imagine is not their God, but an idol after their own fashion." His sacred laws are tyrannical in their eyes, like those of Draco, whose severity made a cotemporary author say "they were written with blood and not with ink. Therefore, instead of drawing near Him with a heart full of confidence and joy, they come before Him with trembling, I may say almost with horror."

And how far is this unworthy idea of God from the truth? Not thus did the Prophet King think when he said: "Thou, O Lord, art sweet and mild." The Prophet Jeremias did not think thus when speaking to the Jews in the name of God. He said: "I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord: thoughts of peace, and not of affliction." Behold in what form He appeared to Elias, who was furious against His enemies, that He might teach him a lesson of meekness and patience. He did not come in the earthquake which shook Mount Horeb, nor in the tempest which tore up the trees and bore them away, nor in the consuming fire, but in the gentle whistling of the summer wind.

Behold how He punished the Prophet Jonas, when He was angry, because His threats against Ninive had not been executed. He withered up the tree which had shaded him from the sun ; and when the prophet complained, He answered him : “ Thou art grieved for the ivy for which thou hast not laboured, nor made it to grow ; and shall I not spare Ninive, that great city.”

We find in the Gospel a similar lesson given to the apostles by our gentle Lord. They wanted Him to send down fire from heaven upon the Samaritans, who drove them from their city, and He answered them : “ You know not of what spirit you are. The Son of Man came not to destroy souls, but to save.” I stop here, for if I were to say all I should wish, I should have to quote the whole Gospel, which is filled with the praise and the tokens of divine goodness. Our God is severe and unpitying ! Truly, we might as well say that honey is bitter, and light darkness, because, according to the work attributed to St. Denis, the Areopagite, the nature of God is the essence of goodness—is pure and unmixed goodness. I acknowledge, however, that at death mercy will be ended, and sinners will be left to inexorable justice ; but I pray you to observe the long-suffering of our good God towards them during their life—the meekness, the patience with which He has borne their

sinfulness, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should return to penance." Remark again what says the Prophet Isaias : "He is bountiful to forgive," remitting the sins of all who are truly repentant, and instantly restoring them to friendship, not only once or twice, or seven times, but as often as they seek His mercy, as our divine Lord teaches us.* And when He acts thus He is not ignorant of their ingratitude. He knows beforehand the terrible abuse they will make of His clemency, and yet He forgives them all. Now, I ask, where is there a reasoning man who, after witnessing such great goodness, dares still to say that God is severe and unmerciful? Oh! he will rather cry out, compelled by admiration—he will cry out, I say, with St. Austin: "My God, my God, I dare to say, and Thou wilt pardon the holy rapture which Thy great goodness plunges me into. If Thou wert not God Thou wouldst be unjust, for we sin grievously, we love sin, we rejoice in sin, we publish it and make a parade of it, and Thou dost not condemn us. We provoke Thee to vengeance, and Thou showest us nothing but mercy."

And if, after such instances of gentleness and mercy, there are still hardened sinners to be found who prefer to die impenitent than receive the pardon offered to them, who can

* Matthew 18—22.

be blamed for their loss but themselves?—or, again, what further proof can God give of His clemency that it can be no longer doubted? Is He entirely to give up every right of justice?—to forget the necessary rules of equity?—to abrogate His holy laws, so that with impunity men may lose all fear, and be able to offend Him with perfect liberty? What sort of government would that be, and what man would be insolent enough to lay down such a line of conduct for the Master of the World?

It is not this that we ask for, say those who calumniate His goodness, let Him punish hardened sinners by the rules of strict justice, we will never complain of that, but why let all His vengeance loose upon them, why punish momentary faults with everlasting chastisements? Is this gentleness and mercy? Is it not rather a proof of extreme and horrible severity? Stop. I say in my turn stop these blasphemies. He is not too severe in condemning the guilty. He must do it to satisfy the requirements of His justice, and to promote the well-being of human society. These two truths are so thoroughly understood by all observing minds, that they do not require proofs. Would it be conformable to the laws of equity to punish infinite and irreparable offences by a temporary punishment?

And would it be for the welfare of society to let all human passions loose by substituting

punishments which will end for those which are eternal, the fear of which, as it is, is not sufficient to hinder sin ?

Let us well believe that whatever peace, security, and happiness there is to be found on earth we owe it to the fear of hell. If many sinners are saved it is the fear of hell which has opened heaven to them. The severity with which God is reproached is necessary, and proceeds from His greatness. If He is severe to some it is for the general good, and thus truly spiritual men, in spite of these terrifying examples of His justice, believe Him to be most merciful and loving, and those who take scandal at it and complain are blind and hardened sinners.

CHAPTER VII.

It is not true that our venial sins should diminish our filial confidence.

Now I have another error to correct. There are Christians who reflecting on the extreme purity which God demands from His friends when He says, "Be holy because I am holy," and seeing themselves stained with imperfections and venial sins imagine they are not

pleasing to Him, and that He cannot look on them with eyes of love. Thus they close up their hearts with mistrust and fear of coming near Him, persuaded that by presenting such burdened hearts before His pure and piercing eyes he will still further withdraw Himself from them. Oh how willingly I say it, they are mistaken ; all are mistaken who think that our Master is so sensitive to slight transgressions and that His heart is closed against those who from the weakness of their nature fall into them. It is the general opinion of different theologians that slight faults do not deprive us of any sanctifying grace and cannot diminish the friendship of God of which this grace is the principle and source, and consequently God does not love a soul less after these kind of sins than He loved it before.*

* A worthy ecclesiastic, astonished at this assertion, made objections to me about it which may be repeated. In order to prevent this I will reproduce them here, and present briefly the replies which the partisans of this assertion give:—*First Objection.*—As mortal sin entirely destroys sanctifying grace, venial sin must diminish it. *Answer.*—The argument is inconclusive because it is certain that mortal and venial sin differ in their nature. *Second Objection.*—French theologians, and even catechists, are opposed to this doctrine, for they positively say that venial sin weakens grace. *Answer.*—If they mean by this, grace in general they refer to actual grace. If they refer to sanctifying grace to weaken it, is not to diminish it, but only to deprive it of its support and its stay. *Third Objection.*—Many texts

I say again, and it is the consequence which proceeds from the principle I have laid down. If some one more guilty than another of venial sins, possesses at the same time a greater degree of sanctifying grace, he is dearer and more pleasing to God. In truth who can ever persuade himself that God, whose character is so mild and gentle can be angry with His servants and His friends on account of their little faults, knowing human weakness as He does, which generally speaking renders them inevitable, because it is written, "A just man shall fall seven times." Let us be certain that our ordinary falls inspire Him with more pity than displeasure or anger, according to those sweet words of the prophet king:—"As a father hath compassion on his children so hath the Lord compassion on them that fear Him, for He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust." If it is a fault among men to be easily irritated against a friend when he is guilty of a trifling neglect how dare we attri-

of Scripture say that venial sin impairs charity and diminishes love. *Answer.*—Yes, our love for God but not His love for us, and it is in this sense we must understand the similar expressions of ascetical authors. *Fourth Objection.*—But we see in all spiritual books that God confers fewer favours on souls who commit venial sins. *Answer.*—Certainly He deprives them of His favours and withdraws His sensible love, but when a father acts in this way towards a son does he love him the less?

bute it to God, the most patient and gentle of all friends, even when He has to bear great offences against Himself. "God is a just judge," says the Psalmist, "Strong and patient, is He angry every day?" He who commits only venial sins ought not to believe that God is displeased with him as men are vexed with those who wound them by some word or action, repulsing them, and showing them less kindness than before. He should be persuaded that though God holds the smallest sin in aversion and will have satisfaction for it because He is justice itself, he is still in perfect friendship with Him. Hear what He says in the second book of Kings:—"I will be to him a father, and He shall be to me a son, and if he commit any iniquity I will correct him with the rod of men and with the stripes of the children of men, but my mercy I will not take away from him." As He has made this promise be sure He will keep it. He will punish the smallest faults with due chastisement, but His friendship for us, and ours with Him, will not be lessened, just as a king who might have forbidden a certain thing under penalty of a fine, and should make his chief favourite pay it if he had incurred it, without however being in the least displeased with him; and it is certain the favourite would pay it without being less at ease with his prince.

I wish however to remark that I am not

speaking of the venial sins which some people commit deliberately and knowingly, and for which they have a secret affection for, though it is true these do not weaken God's love for us, they diminish our love for Him, they deprive Him of His chief delight, they weaken filial confidence, if even they do not destroy it entirely, as we can easily understand. How can the heart be open to the delights of Divine love when it is continually closed up by the severe reproaches of conscience? How can it make acts which are suitable for such an intimate friendship, protesting, for example, that it desires nothing more ardently than to please Him or to unite itself perfectly to Him, while it is still attached to sin and has a strong affection for it. I make bold to say that the fervour of charity suffers more from these sort of sins than even from mortal sins effaced by absolution. But if we speak of those faults of weakness, of which we have sincerely repented, it is so perfectly true that they ought neither to disturb our love or diminish our confidence, that even our past sins, however grave they may have been, ought not to produce that effect when they have once been washed away in the waters of penance. I am now going to prove this, that I may dispel the unfounded fears of some deluded souls.

CHAPTER VIII.

It is not true that mortal sins blotted out by penance are an obstacle to this holy liberty.

THOSE people have a false idea of God, who, after having committed numerous grievous sins for which they are heartily sorry, and have received absolution, draw near to God with shame and are ill at ease, feeling sure that He still remembers their past iniquity. But on what is this opinion founded? It is in this way they answer that things are arranged among men. If some one has been greatly injured by an old friend, the former forgives him out of charity, but he does not forget it, and the friendship is never as warm as it was before. Here again is a comparison with men, as if *men* knew how to love, as if *their* hearts were to serve as a model for God! However it may be with poor human nature, it will amply suffice in order to confute this error, that it does not accord with the teaching of faith, because faith teaches us for certain that a sinner, however guilty he may be, who approaches the sacrament of penance worthily, receives pardon for all his sins, and is restored to that degree of friendship with God which he enjoyed before having sinned, and perhaps attains a higher degree if his contrition has been ardent, and he is

actually as dear to his Creator as if his good Master had cast all his past enmity into eternal forgetfulness. You will surely believe Him when you hear His own words. Listen to Him then speaking by Isaias :—"I am He that blot out thy iniquities, and I will not remember thy sins."

The author of a spiritual work, reasoning on these words of Isaias, makes a striking observation. He says that our Lord, when He reproached Jerusalem with murdering His prophets, did not say thou who hast killed, but who killest the prophets, as if He wished to teach us that forgiven sins are so entirely forgotten, that the thought of reproaching those who had committed them did not occur to Him. This seems to be also the opinion of St. Austin, when he says :—"The Lord so completely pardons and so entirely remits our offences that not only does He abstain from vengeance but even from reproaches, and as if that were not sufficient He gives us back His love entirely." There may be penitents who have good reasons for doubting the reality of their conversion, but those who have no well founded doubt about it, whose conscience witnesses to the contrary, are most unreasonable when they torment and disquiet themselves about being in friendship with God ; I will say more it is want of faith, because He has said Himself by one of His Prophets, "I have blotted out thy iniqui-

ties as a cloud, and thy sins as a mist." "God," says John Taulerus, "is a present God. He looks at us as we actually are, and not at what we were in the past. And therefore there is no reason why the converted sinner should not be at ease with Him as before his fall." From this I conclude, that the sins washed away by penance, instead of being a hindrance to our increase in God's love, are rather another reason for having entire confidence in Him, because this very pardon is another proof of the goodness of our God, and of His tender love for us. Let each of us then try to look on God, not according to the imperfections of human nature, and the false notions of the ignorant; but as reason and faith tell us, and both teach us, as He is the best and most loving of all Masters, His subjects please Him well by being familiar with Him, that the greatest sins provoke Him not to anger, in punishing the wicked according to the laws of justice He has not hatred against them in His heart, however the wicked may injure Him, He is always disposed to pardon them, that He is full of mercy, especially for those faults of weakness into which His faithful servants fall, that after having pardoned the iniquities of great sinners He loves them as much as if He had entirely forgotten all. And now tell me if we form, as we ought to do, such an idea of our God, if we take de-

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light in contemplating His great prerogatives, is it possible that we should be afraid of Him? Certainly not. On the contrary, we are drawn towards a holy liberty in our whole intercourse with so gentle a master, so faithful a friend, so good a father. Whether we lay before Him our difficulties and our troubles, or ask Him to help us in our undertakings and crown them with success, as well in the sacraments as in prayer, and in all our communications with Him, we should use the familiarity of love, without forgetting the respect due to Him, but with the humility which befits us, and yet with that confidence and joy of heart which will elevate it and make it generous.

CHAPTER IX.

What are the fears which prevent us from serving God with joy and confidence, and what ought we to think of them?

THE apostle St. John tells us, that charity casteth out fear, and therefore it is certain that fear spoils the perfection of charity. There are three kinds of fear which assail the servants of God: first, the fear of not being in a

state of grace ; secondly, the fear of falling from that blessed state when we have attained it ; thirdly, the fear of dying out of the grace of God. Any one of these fears drives confidence and the sweet emotions of Divine love out of the heart. The first fear disturbs our peace, for what is friendship but "a mutual love well understood?" and we cannot rest with joyful confidence in the friendship of our God, if we are altogether ignorant whether we are in His eyes objects of love or hatred. The second fear troubles our peace, because there is no real enjoyment in an insecure possession, and the more precious the possession the more painful the fear of losing it. The third fear disturbs the soul, because the thought of dying the enemy of God and of passing thus into eternity is enough to change every joy into bitterness.

But perhaps all these fears are groundless. No, some will answer, they are but too well founded, and terrible to say, they rest on God's own words. Are we in a state of grace? Solomon replies, "Man knoweth not whether he be worthy of love or hatred," and in another place, "Be not without fear about sin forgiven."

If we possess God's grace are we sure not to lose it? St. Paul tells us, "He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall." Have we at least some assurance of our final

perseverance? The Gospel says, "Many are called but few chosen." Besides these awful texts, there are many other considerations of the same nature. Are we in a state of grace? Alas! we know so little about our own souls. We do not know whether we had the proper dispositions for the sacrament of penance, or if since we were reconciled with God, we may not have fallen into some grievous sin. Shall we continue in grace? Alas! how great is human weakness, how strong, how numerous, and how crafty are our enemies, and what terrible examples of falling away we find in the history of mankind. Finally, shall we die in the friendship of God? Alas! His judgments are impenetrable, and no one knows whether he is among the elect or the condemned. Is this terrifying enough? No. Many spiritual writers, whose object is to produce in us deep humility and great vigilance, show us terrible pictures of human weakness, the difficulties of salvation, and overwhelm us with reasons to prove that a vast multitude will be lost, while only a few will be saved.

What is the result of this? That many pious people are convinced by this reasoning, are always in fear of presumption, look on the authors who maintain the contrary as lax, and spend their lives in an agony of fear, or at least in constant doubt and uncertainty, not knowing how to answer this severe teaching

and not daring to resist it. I pity these souls, and I want to put an end to their sufferings, and to break those miserable chains which keep them from freedom and confidence in God. I lay it down, therefore, as a principle, that all those who are striving after Christian perfection should drive away these fears instead of encouraging them. There are two reasons for this : first, that they ought not to cause trouble to any one ; secondly, that they do more harm than good. Let us first examine the force of these two reasons as regards the first fear, and afterwards we will look into the others.

CHAPTER X.

The fear which the uncertainty of their justification produces in pious people, does not tend to make them humble.

As regards the first fear, I ask these timid people who are always in fear of not being in a state of grace, what advantage is derived from that fear ? They will answer, if I mistake not, that it makes them more humble and vigilant. More humble, because it prevents them from having a good opinion of themselves, and of relying too much on their own virtues ; more vigilant, because every thought of it is like a

spur which goads them forward to extremes of penance, that they may make their reconciliation with God secure. There are some masters of the spiritual life who really hold these opinions, and recommend persons to retain this fear, saying that they also believe, that God has left us in uncertainty as to the possession of His love, because He knows that the doubts and fears that arise from it will be profitable to us. But let us now examine the reasons they allege in support of their opinion, and see if they are solid ones; first, it is surely an error to confound humility with discontent with self, and arrogance with the sense of pardoned sin. There is no connection between the two things, they are entirely opposed to each other, as we shall shortly see. What is that pride which we have named arrogance? The doctors of the Church tell us, that it does not consist in recognising gifts in ourselves for which we faithfully give glory to the Giver, but in looking on them as our own, in thinking highly of ourselves in consequence of them, in supposing ourselves to be better than others. The angel of the schools, St. Thomas, says, "I do not see how it can be a sin to praise good in ourselves, and to feel pleasure in doing so," and to support this decision he quotes the words of the Apostle, "Now we have received, not the spirit of this world, but the spirit which is of God, that we may know the things that

are given us from God." St. Austin, speaking of those who manifest the grace God has given them, says that this manifestation is not a vice but a virtue.

To make known God's generosity towards us proceeds from faith not arrogance. St. Bernard is of the same opinion, saying that the Apostle does not forbid man to rejoice nor even to glory in his virtues, but he forbids him to rejoice and glorify himself as though these were his own. These are his own words, "St. Paul does not say why glorify yourself? but why glorify yourself as if you had not received everything." His intention was not to condemn him who glories in the graces God has given him, but rather him who forgets his benefactor, and usurps the glory which ought to be rendered to Him for His gifts. "You ought to know, therefore," he adds, "that there is good in you, but that it does not come from yourself, otherwise you will not glorify yourself at all, or you will fall into vain glory." In conclusion I will quote St. Teresa, when she exhorts a soul who had received some singular gifts from God to give thanks. "Let her take no heed of that sort of humility which consists in turning away our attention from the gifts which God has given us. This is false humility, for if we do not take account of the graces bestowed on us, how can we be drawn to greater love for Him from whom we receive

them? We never love any one who is good to us so much as when his benefits are present to our minds. If I am allowed, and if it is even meritorious, to remember that God has brought me into light and redeemed me with His blood, why should I be forbidden to recollect that by His grace, instead of taking pleasure as heretofore in unholy and profane conversations, the only intercourse which pleases me is that which refers to Him?

“Men are so constituted that it seems to me impossible, that he who does not believe himself to be particularly loved by God, can undertake great things for His service. Our minds are so drawn towards the earth, that it is necessary for God to give us a pledge of future happiness before we can detach ourselves from things present.” This great teacher in the guidance of souls adds, that the devil is very anxious not to be found out by souls who are devoted to prayer and an interior life; and he believes, the surest way of hindering their progress in virtue is to imbue them with false notions about humility. Knowing the truth of this, how is it possible to call that confiding soul proud who, believing herself to be in the friendship of God, drives away all vain disquiet, and gives Him thanks for His great mercy? Is not this rather the true way of learning to love prayer, of carrying the yoke of the Lord joyfully, and of constantly increas-

ing in fervour ? These are precious gifts, quite incompatible with disquietude and anxiety about justification. My adversaries will, perhaps, reply, that if this confidence is not pride, at least it does not promote humility ; for the less a man thinks well of himself, the less he is contented with his interior state, and the more humble he is. But I think that while proving this confidence is not pride, I have also proved that mistrust is not humility. Is it necessary to dwell on a truth which is so very clear ? Is it necessary, then, that to be humble I must be unhappy, anxious about my state before God, uncertain of His love, and not able to take any account of the graces He has given me ? Then, the Blessed Virgin was not humble when she exclaimed, in her beautiful canticle of thanksgiving : “ My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour, because He hath done great things to me.” Then, the citizens of heaven are not humble, who are certain of their salvation, and are in perfect joy. According to this doctrine, the most humble souls must be those of the lost, who truly look on themselves as abandoned by all, and the most miserable of human beings. Disquietude and anxiety have nothing in common with humility.

The truly humble man looks on himself as utterly poor and abject ; but seeing the gifts God has given him, rejoices in them, loves

God the more, and renders him hearty thanks for them. This is what St. Paul calls glorifying oneself in God ; and he does it himself when he says : “ I have in no way come short of them that are above measure apostles, although I be nothing.” And again : “ I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, but by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace in me hath not been void, but I have laboured more abundantly than all they : yet not I, but the grace of God with me.” But the advocates of fear do not deem themselves conquered, for they say the saints, can see their graces and supernatural gifts without any vain-glory ; but this needs a wisdom which few possess : it is the privilege of that little band of chosen souls in whom humility has taken deep root. Woe to those who imitate them in this, until they are as firmly grounded in virtue.

Hard-hearted indeed are these men who would thus entirely prevent the imperfect in virtue, or the greater number of God’s servants, from obtaining peace of soul and spiritual joy. But, happily for us, St. Paul, that great teacher of evangelical wisdom, brought us from the third heaven a very different doctrine—unless we suppose that all the inhabitants of Philippi were already perfect—for he says fearlessly to them : “ Rejoice in the Lord always : again I say rejoice ;” and to the inhabitants of

Thessalonica he dared to use the same language: "Always rejoice, in all things give thanks." And, I ask, how can we rejoice and give thanks if we do not believe ourselves to be in friendship with God?

Let these timid and cautious directors of souls warn, if they dare to do so, this wise apostle; let them entreat him to be careful of the humility of these new Christians, and not to give them an occasion of vain-glory or arrogance. He will answer them. "I know human weakness better than you do, but souls who are imperfect in virtue, can avoid this danger without our inspiring them with fear and terror, which spoil the vigour of the soul and its zeal for advancement, and hinder that sweet union with God which He desires should exist. And the humility you mean is servile, miserable, and restless, like that of the unhappy lost ones." Certainly, if the most important thing in spiritual life, is to fly from the most distant occasions of vain-glory, wise directors of souls are greatly mistaken when they take so much pains, to quiet those who torment themselves with unfounded scruples. They ought rather to exhort them to be in trouble and uneasy—to see a sin capable of depriving them of God's grace in every one of their actions—and nothing else but these absurd consequences can result from so false a principle.

CHAPTER XI.

This fear does not promote humility, nor bring about a true conversion.

I THINK I have made it clear that this fear of not standing well with God does not promote Christian humility, let us now see whether it tends to produce a conversion. If I were writing for those people who lead an irregular life, and whose consciences are very lax, I would at once acknowledge that it does, for there is no doubt that fear is useful for those who are constantly falling into the snares laid by the devil, and that it induces them to seek the sacrament of penance, But I am writing only for spiritual persons, who at the beginning of their conversion made an exact confession of their sins, and thus purified their consciences, and who renew this purification constantly in their ordinary confessions, who have abstained for a long time from mortal sin, and look on it as more fearful than any earthly misfortune, who strive to draw nearer to God and to unite themselves closely with Him. What profit can be derived from this fear? In the absence of any answer I will reply. It serves only to harass consciences by self-examinations as minute as they are painful, to induce endless confessions of sins already fully acknowledged and long

since forgiven, to detail, and that at great cost and pain, circumstances at once most trifling and humiliating. Is this the result we wish to obtain by constantly preaching about fear, and trying to impress on pious people that they know not whether they are worthy of love or hatred? But if from over docility they run into this extreme, is there any prudent confessor who would allow it, and who would not, on the contrary, do his best to check it, and disperse all these foolish scruples? But one who loves God and is careful how to please Him, like those for whom I am writing, does not require fear to induce them to detest their sins. Though, like St. Mary Magdalene, they are assured their sins are pardoned, they continue to weep over them; not that they may make their reconciliation with God more certain, but through the influence of Divine charity, and from the sorrow for having been ungrateful to a God who is infinitely loving, and to whom their affections have long since been given. And these higher motives lead far more to acts of perfect penance, than those which spring from servile fear, and the former way of acting advances a soul far more easily than the latter. From whatever point of view we look at this kind of fear, we see there is no advantage in it. It only disturbs the soul; causes people to waste that time in useless and painful anxiety which they might far better employ by advanc-

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ing in perfection; and these results are not only most injurious to themselves, but also most pleasing to the enemy of our salvation, who we know, on the testimony of St. Teresa, looks on it as so much gain for him to be able to disturb people who are spiritual, and to rob them of their peace, because when they are in this state of perturbation they cannot entirely devote themselves to the love and praise of their Divine Master.

CHAPTER XII.

Those who approve of this fear, are in a delusion about justification.

My opponents say, why then does God leave us in ignorance of our interior state, if the fear which it causes be not salutary for us? To prove to them that this question is no difficulty to me, I will make three answers to it, any one of which is sufficient. First, I deny that it is God's will we should live in entire uncertainty of His love, for if we have not an absolute metaphysical certainty, we have, at least, a moral certainty, in a knowledge and conviction founded on reasons which are so

strong, that they leave no room for serious doubts, and if God gives us the means of dispelling our fears on this head, how can we say it is His will that we should torment ourselves because it is good for us? And I am curious to know what solid reasons our adversaries have to prove that God has left us in ignorance of our justification, because it will be of more service to us than the knowledge of His love for us. And I think I can give a much truer and more satisfactory solution of this obscurity. It is doubtless the will of our great God, that during our mortal life we are to walk by faith; it is not fitting that He should work perpetual miracles by revealing to each man the state of his soul, for that is the only means by which we could be perfectly certain of our justification. He does not ordinarily allow the angels and saints to appear to mortals, and teach them what passes in the other world, though it would be very useful for us, both by holding us back from sin and drawing us onwards in the way of perfection. Besides, if God were to manifest the interior state of souls, what harm would it do to the just and the wicked? The latter would strive earnestly to regain the happiness they had lost, and the former, filled with joy, would be more careful to keep themselves safe for all eternity, instead of wasting time in tormenting their poor consciences. There are saints to whom God has

pecially revealed their interior state ; did they look on this light as injurious to their advancement ? On the contrary, touched by His great mercy, they knew not how to show their gratitude sufficiently to our Lord. My third and last answer is, God, who has thrown a veil of mystery over many truths of our holy religion, does not condemn those who respectfully try to penetrate it, and to throw light upon the darkness. Even if it were true that God had concealed His love for us, it does not follow that it would be an evil if we try to attain that assurance which is called moral certainty ; an assurance which is certainly not infallible, but which suffices, at least, to bring peace to the soul. The second reason which I alleged against this fear, is that those who entertain it have no real reason for doing so. No, there is no reason for it, not even those passages of Scripture quoted further back, and which we will now discuss. First, those words of Ecclesiasticus, "Be not without fear about sin forgiven," do not mean never be easy about the sin which has been remitted, but do not be easy on account of this pardon as if you had no other sins to fear. This is the common interpretation of the words of the Holy Ghost, and certainly it is that of common sense ; for if it is granted that sin be pardoned, there is no reason for fearing that it is not. Besides, the text explains itself by the words which fol-

low it, "And add not sin upon sin; say not the mercy of the Lord is great, he will have mercy on the multitude of my sins." Finally, the Greek text sets all doubts at an end, for it is translated thus, "Be not secure about pardon received in such a manner that thou add sin to sin." This shows plainly enough that the intention of the Holy Spirit in this passage, was to warn the newly remitted sinner not to make the pardon he has received a pretext for committing fresh sins, as if he had an assurance of obtaining absolution again. However, if any one persists that these words recommend us to fear even pardoned sin, I will not dispute it, for as it shows that sin is really remitted, we can only be in doubt as to the effect this has on us, the punishment we have deserved and the inclination we have to fall into fresh faults, all the sad consequence of our former weakness, which give just ground for some fear and uneasiness. The next terrifying text, is that saying of the Wise Man, "Man knoweth not whether he be worthy of love or hatred." First I must remark, that according to St. Bernard, this text relates to predestination and eternal reprobation, which has nothing to do with the question we are now treating. But even if it were true that these words refer to our ignorance of the actual state of our souls, I say again that though God does not permit men to have an infallible

knowledge of their justification, He, at all events, allows them to have that intimate conviction and moral certainty which suffices to give them peace, and act with all confidence towards Him. We can prove this truth from the authority of the Fathers. How, says St. Basil, can a man be certain that God has pardoned his sins? And he answers, if there is in his heart a feeling similar to that which made the Prophet King cry out "I have hated and abhorred iniquity." It is easy to find out whether we have an affection or hatred for sin. St. John Chrysostom quotes these words of the Apostle, "The Spirit himself giveth testimony to our spirit, that we are the sons of God;" and adds, when the Holy Ghost Himself is witness to a fact, what room is there for ambiguity? St. Austin, commenting on Psalm cxxxviii, and striving to induce faithful souls to believe without doubting that they are in friendship with God, foresees this objection and refutes it. Why should not, he says, each one of the faithful say to himself, I am holy? this is not the expression of a proud man's self-complacency, it is the confession of a grateful soul. St. Leo the Great forbids us to doubt the presence of God in us when we experience its effects. "Let spiritual persons," says he, "look well into themselves, let them examine their most secret feelings with a nice discernment, and if they find any of the fruits of

charity within them, let them not doubt that God is present in their hearts."

Let us hold for certain, says St. Bonaventura, that if we have not an absolute and certain knowledge of our justification, we have it, at least, by a probable conviction and that confidence of the will which proceeds from conscience. For that purity of conscience which we acquire by driving out sin, gives peaceful security to the soul, and showing her that she has obtained a little merit assures her of the reward."

CHAPTER XIII.

The fears that pious people entertain about the validity of their confessions are not founded on reason.

AND now we can call reason to our aid as well as authority, to dispel doubts and uneasiness, provided that they are clearly explained. There are two which can deprive a soul of confidence and peace. A person may imagine he has not received pardon for the sins which he believes he has committed, or he may think that since his last confession he has fallen into some grave fault without knowing it, and if he is ingenious

in self-tormenting he justifies his terror in the following way. If he doubts the validity of his absolution, he says to himself, I know that the sacrament can remit all sins, provided that it be conferred and received in a legitimate way, but what proof have I of its being so. Had the confessor the power to absolve me, and has he really intended to do so? He knows, but I am ignorant. Then was there nothing essential lacking in my accusations, and was I sufficiently contrite at heart? I do not know this either, and therefore I am in misery. If he is afraid he has committed some mortal sin since his last confession, he terrifies his poor conscience more and more by saying, No one can take an exact and certain account of his interior acts, experience tells us this truth, and besides it is clearly confirmed by Scripture. "I am not conscious to myself of anything," says the great Apostle, "yet am I not hereby justified." The prophet king, overwhelmed with his interior darkness, cried to God, "Who can understand sins? From my secret ones cleanse me, O Lord." St. Austin seems to believe that we can have some sin hidden in some fold of our conscience when he says, "You see no sin in yourself, but perhaps God sees it, because His eye is far more piercing than yours." In truth, is not all this enough to terrify us? I answer that all this is not what you imagine it to be, for in fact if I can prove that all these possi-

bilities only prevent our having an absolute and metaphysical certainty, shall I not also prove at the same time that there remains that moral certainty, which is quite sufficient to drive away all vain disquietude, and to establish us in peace? And I believe that it will not be difficult for me to prove this. Let us see now what we should think of the first cause of your terrors. I am ignorant, you say, if the confessor who heard my accusation had the power to absolve me. I am ignorant if he really wished to remit my sins. I am ignorant whether my confession has been sufficient. Lastly, I am ignorant whether my contrition was as great as the sacrament requires. Before we go into details, let us agree on the following point, one which is looked on by all theologians as certain. I will suppose a penitent who after one or many, invalid, and even sacrilegious confessions, comes at length to the holy tribunal worthily prepared, *i.e.*, sufficiently contrite, and that he says nothing about their invalidity or profanations, either because he is ignorant of them in good faith, or because he has entirely forgotten that he has committed them; he is pardoned for them as well as his other sins, and is thus fully justified and restored to friendship with his good Master. This point being granted, I will examine each doubt in detail. You doubt, first, the power or will of the minister of the sacrament of

penance. You are wrong, replies Suarez, because, generally speaking, you confess to priests who are well known. Let us suppose, however, that while travelling you have confessed to some strange priest, who really did not remit your sins. Very well, these sins have been remitted, as I have told you just now, by your subsequent absolutions. Secondly, you doubt having brought requisite dispositions for the sacrament to the holy tribunal, *i.e.*, a sufficiently careful examination, a sufficiently exact accusation of your mortal sins, (for other faults are not obligatory and cannot interfere with the validity of the sacraments.) Lastly, you doubt whether you had sufficient contrition, and these are I think all the conditions actually required. But are they then so difficult that a pious person should fear that he did not possess them all, in some one of the numerous confessions made since his conversion? You fear you did not make a sufficiently sincere accusation, *i.e.*, you fear that you knowingly concealed some mortal sin, but believe me this fear is a phantom, for a fear in such a case is a great deal more than a doubt, and he who has really been guilty of this reserve does not doubt about it, but knows it in such a manner that he could swear to it. You fear you had not sufficient contrition, but the necessary contrition is simply attrition, or a regret for having offended God, arising either from a con-

viction of the vileness of sin, or by the fear of hell, together with a wish not to sin again, and with confidence that our sins will be pardoned. This attrition, says the Holy Council of Trent, is an impulsion of the Holy Ghost preparing the sinner to return to justice, and though it does not suffice to justify him without the sacrament, it disposes him to receive sanctifying grace by the priestly absolution. Is this then something rare and difficult? It seems to me that every one can possess this sorrow if he really wishes it, and certainly you have not made so many confessions without having possessed this earnest and therefore efficacious desire. For what must we think of the confessions of ordinary Christians, and what hope should we have of their salvation if those who walk in the path of perfection can lawfully fear, despite their careful preparation, that they have not sufficient sorrow? In truth can we believe that God has chosen to make this remedy so difficult for Christians to attain, when it is necessary for them and indispensable for their eternal salvation? We must then look on it as an event morally impossible that he who has served God faithfully for many years, avoided mortal sin with horror, frequently confessed his daily faults, should not at least once have come to the holy tribunal with the requisite dispositions for washing away his past sins and recovering the friendship of God.

Such is the opinion of the learned Suarez, whose own words I will quote :—" A Christian who has been converted for some length of time, who is careful about his salvation and advancement in virtue, who has frequently gone to confession with a preparation he believed to be sufficient, may be in tranquility about his justification, even though he may have doubts, more or less reasonable, about the validity of some of the absolutions which he has received, because it is morally certain that all have not been inefficacious. And if he can rely on one only, that is sufficient to let him be prudently assured he then re-entered into friendship with his God." And, further, I can see no reason which should prevent a pious man, especially if he is enlightened, from being morally certain that each of his confessions is valid, for he has always taken care to excite sorrow for his sins, and to make a firm purpose not to commit them any more. He has spoken to God in the sincerity of his heart. What more is necessary? Every man who has made some progress in the knowledge and love of God is contrite whenever he chooses to be so. And it is well to remark here that the requisite contrition is not an act of the feelings but of the will. If then such a man is still uneasy about the acts of contrition he had made, he falls into the absurd error of sceptics, who knowing nothing for certain, despite the

claims of philosophy and of common sense, doubt whether they know what they know, and if they will what they will. But I will not leave a doubt unsolved, an objection unanswered, and some one will say, supposing the confessor has forgotten to absolve me, or made a mistake in pronouncing the words of the sacrament? I answer that a faithful servant of God has other grounds besides absolution for believing himself certainly to be in friendship with God, *i.e.*, an act of perfect charity; for every act of this kind is sufficient to change an enemy of God into His friend.

And who is the man, however little advanced in spirituality, who in the sacrament of reconciliation, and even in his prayers, does not make these kind of acts? Every really pious soul can then believe without doubting that some of these acts have restored them to the love of God.

Do you tell me that it is difficult to possess this perfect contrition, and therefore it is rarely found? I am well aware that this is a common prejudice, and I answer, first, that the smallest degree of pure love renders contrition perfect; second, that during the forty centuries which elapsed before the death of the Redeemer, this contrition was the only means of salvation, and it is so at the present day for all heretics who are in good faith, the number of whom is perhaps far greater than we imagine. And if

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these acts of perfect charity are as difficult to make as people say, even for those who practise evangelical perfection, what must we think about the salvation of the just under the old law who had so little light granted to them, and those excellent people who live and die in heresy, without a suspicion that their religion is false, and their creeds are condemned? Woe to the human race if the opinion which I dispute were a true one. We ought then to repel it with horror, for the simple reason that it calumniates the goodness of God, because it accuses Him of having given the greater number of men a means of salvation which they can hardly use. And besides if we fully examine the question, I ask what great difficulty is there in a spiritual man arguing in the following manner?

Both reason and faith tell us that God is infinitely good and infinitely loving, and that He certainly merits to be loved more than ourselves, and more than any other creature in the world. I am ready, then, to sacrifice all things rather than offend Him. But I have been unhappy enough to do this often. Yes, often, with an abominable injustice, I have preferred unworthy creatures to Him. I have preferred myself to Him, and in doing so I have offended Him cruelly. I ought, then, to sorrow for this infidelity and injustice. I do indeed grieve for it. I am more afflicted about

it than at every other evil that ever befel me, and I make the firm resolution to trample under foot all love and all fear which can lead me to sin again. What is to prevent a faithful servant of God from making such an act? And if he has a will to make it, it is made because he is master of his will. Can one imagine a being who is not an infidel, and has not lost his common sense, and who can maintain that he has been willing to make these acts hundreds of times, and has never done it? I answer that he is a man who shuts his eyes that he may not see the sun. Let him open them, and he will certainly see the light. That a servant of God should doubt about some particular act of this kind I can imagine; but I cannot conceive it possible that, among so many acts repeated daily since his conversion, he should not be able to find a single true and efficacious one. The learned Suarez cannot conceive it either. "If we suppose," says he, "a man who has been free for a long time from all mortal sin, who daily makes the best acts of contrition he can, it does not seem possible that sometimes he should not make true ones, supposing the principles that we have about the grace of God and His promises to be certain."

CHAPTER XIV.

The fear of having lost the fruit of absolution by fresh sins, of which we are not aware, is also a delusion.

BUT there is another cause for doubt and perplexity on this matter which it is well to subvert. Some one will say: Is it not possible that I have committed a mortal sin without knowing it since my last confession? I do not deny that it is possible; but what does that signify, if you have the moral certainty that this misfortune has not befallen you? And you have this certainty; for, according to the common opinion of theologians, before committing a mortal sin, there must be a full advertence and perfect consent,—your conscience must know that this act is forbidden by the law of God, and nevertheless you choose to do it.

Now, I ask, could a timid person do this without being aware of it, and without being able to remember it perfectly? That it may happen, and alas does happen but too often to habitual sinners accustomed to crime, who, in the words of holy Job, “drink in iniquity like water,” I can conceive, and I acknowledge. They live so carelessly, and so entirely forget the matter of their own salvation that, after

they have knowingly and willingly committed a mortal sin, they entirely forget it, and cannot tell afterwards if their act was fully deliberate. But who can suppose such stupidity in people who desire perfection, who prefer God to all other things, and fear nothing so much as to offend His divine Majesty? Their love is too vigilant to allow them to fall unawares into an evil which is foreign to all their habits, and of which they have such a horror. A mortal sin would be most voluntary on their part; but then they are so unlikely to be mistaken about the matter, because a mere doubt about it torments them, and destroys their peace, until they are convinced of their innocence.

There is as much difference between a delicate conscience and a soul accustomed to sin as between the skin of the hand, and the apple of the eye. Strike the hand severely, the pain will be slight and will not last long; only touch the apple of the eye, the pain will be acute, and tears will flow for long afterwards.

The following should be decisive for timid persons:—St. Teresa once asked our Lord if she were pleasing or displeasing to Him, and our good Master replied: “My child, there is a great difference between day and night, between light and darkness. No one can incur my indignation without knowing it for certain.” From this I conclude that the simple doubt about a mortal sin in a pious

person is a certain proof that it has not been committed.

Do you bring me certain texts of Scripture which seem to affirm the contrary? I answer that these texts only refer to those venial sins which the most spiritual persons commit without perceiving them; or, if they mean mortal sin, they only express the actual possibility of such a fall without the conscience perceiving it; but a thing that is possible is not a thing that is accomplished. Let those who live a holy life, then, have no fear about mortal sins with which their conscience does not reproach them. This silence is a certain indication that they are in a state of grace, and they can say, with the beloved disciple, "If our heart do not reprehend us, we have confidence towards God."

CHAPTER XV.

Temptations are not sins, and the disturbance they cause is the only thing to fear.

I MUST not forget to correct another error which often torments over-delicate consciences. If they doubt whether they have consented to

some grievous temptation, although there is a strong probability in their favour, it seems to them the surest way, and the one most in conformity with the rules of a spiritual life, to condemn rather than acquit themselves; and if they do not give judgment in favour of the devil and against their innocence, they at least leave the cause in total indecision, forgetting the great harm they do themselves by this injustice, or denial of justice. I would beg them to remark the three sad effects which I will point out, and which are the necessary consequences of this conduct:—1st. By accustoming their mind to rest upon the most futile and contemptible doubts; by incessantly examining the good or evil of their actions; by never daring to pronounce a decision, except in their disfavour; by being easily disturbed at the smallest shadow of sin; they end by falsifying their judgment, which places them in one or other of these two dangers: either to sin by a false conscience resisting light, or to commit actual follies in taking the surest side. 2nd. They are in danger of insensibly diminishing, and at last completely losing, a horror of mortal sin, no longer looking on it as a crime of inconceivable malice, which we can hardly imagine a sensible man committing, but rather as a weakness of nature which it is almost impossible to avoid. 3rd. This terrible error will lead them gradually to a most fatal kind

of despondency—a sort of despair—at not being able to avoid mortal sin, because, after so many resolutions and so many means for making them fruitful, they still fall into it every day—for such is their conviction—and it alone is sufficient to prevent them from making a firm purpose rather to die than to admit so horrible a thing into their hearts. Let them, on the contrary, judge of themselves as they would others in a similar case. Never let them condemn themselves as guilty of great sins, if there is a probable reason in their favour. Let them get accustomed to decide doubts of conscience prudently, for it is an important thing both for well regulating our lives, and for preserving peace of heart. Let them look on mortal sin as an evil so great, so fatal, so hideous, that one can scarcely imagine a reasonable man committing it, and then they will have an excessive horror of it, and a firm confidence that, by God's grace, they have not fallen into it, and by His help they never will. I do not think it will be useless to confirm what I have said, by quoting a celebrated example recorded by Rossendius, in his Appendix to the *Lives of the Fathers of the Desert*;—"A pious hermit was obliged to leave his cell at times to procure water, and this going forth proved fatal to him, for, having found an occasion of committing a sin of impurity, he unhappily yielded to it. Scarcely had he fallen, when the devil,

giving him no time to rise again and return to himself, tried all he could do to cast him from the pleasure of sin into the depths of despair. He represented to him that he had broken his bond of union with God, and had lost in one day the fruits of his many years of solitude, and that the best thing to do was to leave the desert, to go and live in some town where he could lead a life of enjoyment, and drink his fill of those voluptuous pleasures which he had found sweet to his taste. The temptation was a terrible one, and it seemed probable the unfortunate man, giddy with his fall and blinded by shame, would follow this evil counsel. But grace did not fail him in this extremity, and whispered to him that he ought to escape from the grief which was breaking down his spirit, and to drive away the remembrance of his sin until the storm was past and he was again calm. Then his heart was filled with holy sorrow, he made an act of perfect contrition, which, with his resolution of confessing his sin as soon as possible, restored him to God's friendship. Soon he cried out: Where, then, are now those useless and agonising thoughts which were agitating me? Why did I give myself up to despair? From whence proceeded that strange trouble of my soul? Was it because I had committed a mortal sin? Depart, you lying imaginations—you are but dreams to a man who is awakened! Have

I then grievously offended a God whom I love above all things, and for whom I am ready, with His grace, to give my life a thousand times over? It is not possible! I cannot believe it! I have not sinned! Again I say I have not sinned!—No, I have not sinned!” Consoled by this happy intention, he went back to his cell and resumed his ordinary exercises with his former cheerfulness, as if nothing had happened. And God revealed to his spiritual director that this conduct was wise and salutary, for He told him that his penitent had won a signal victory over the devil. The director, anxious to know the particulars, went to see him a few days after to hear the story. “Is all well with you, my son?” said he at first. “Quite well, Father,” replied the monk. “But,” said the old priest, “God has made known to me that you have sustained a severe conflict with the devil.” “Has God revealed it to you, Father?” replied the other. “Then I will tell you my story in all simplicity.” And then he told his sad fall, and the means he had taken to rise from it. The director, full of admiration, gave hearty thanks to God, and ended the conversation by saying to the repentant sinner: “Truly, my son, thy wisdom has crushed the power of the devil.”

This man had committed an actual sin, but when he saw that his extreme sorrow led him

to despair, simple though he was, he thought of an ingenious way of escape from his misery, and God, instead of reproaching him, praised the good faith and pure intention with which he had acted. And yet a man of spirituality, in friendship with God, on the slightest suspicion, will persuade himself he has lost His grace, although there are the strongest reasons to the contrary. It would be far better, and in accordance with the best-grounded opinions, if he despised his doubt as a useless scruple, and if, after having made an act of perfect contrition for all the sins of his life, he cried aloud, with perfect confidence, "I have not sinned—No, certainly, I have not sinned!" I know that to support the contrary opinion to that which I maintain, it is customary to quote a celebrated saying of St. Gregory the Great: "It is the property of pious souls to see sin where there is none." But let us see if this sentence applies to the present case. It is not rare certainly to find persons recently converted who hate sin, and therefore see it in everything. Their consciences are too much on the alert, and of these the holy doctor is speaking. Does he mean to approve this error, which he calls their property? Certainly not; and he never meant to propose them as models. He simply states a fact, that pious people generally fall into this extreme when they begin to serve God in earnest, when their consciences

are delicate and not sufficiently enlightened, when they have good intentions but not enough prudence- There are other pious people who, having no prudence at all, take every dream of their imagination to be a great sin, and imagine this want of judgment is a good and useful thing; and I maintain that the holy doctor has neither authorised or approved of it. He would rather have disapproved or condemned these foolish scruples as hurtful to the soul, and displeasing to God; and this is what all wise directors do with one accord. To make the idea of St. Gregory's clearer, I will use a comparison. There are certain illnesses which never attack people of a weak constitution, but only those who are robust; and if I say it is the property of robust persons to experience such an illness, do I mean that this illness is a good thing? This is the way in which the words of St. Gregory should be interpreted. I will add but one more reflection: A good thing, when it is used without measure and moderation, may become bad. This often happens to pious souls, but they ought not to be imitated in it.

CHAPTER XVI.

Consequences of the preceding doctrine; it has nothing in common with the Protestant belief about justification.

Thus far, I think, I have demonstrated two things: 1st. That really pious people can be quite certain of God's friendship. 2nd. That this happy conviction gives rise to a holy joy, which leads them to advance in His love, to converse more willingly with Him, and serve Him more zealously. And when these truths are established, I draw this conclusion from them, that those who best understand their own interests, instead of letting themselves be disturbed and terrified by the possibility of sin, should believe themselves to be in grace, and peacefully enjoy that sweet conviction, whenever they have not strong and prudent reasons for believing themselves to be guilty. This has been the way in which wise men in all ages have acted when they were certain of a truth, or of some blessing, as much as poor human nature would let them, they looked on the possibility of losing it as nothing, and never concerned themselves about it. If some one, not content with the general sense of security, had still a trouble or anxiety because he said

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he might be deceived, and if he wearied himself with numberless precautions to insure his safety, sensible men laughed at him and looked on him as a fool. Such was a certain Artemon, of whom Plutarch speaks, who was so afraid that a stone or a tile would fall on his head that he would never go into the street except in a closed litter, and in his own house he always had a shield held over his head by two of his servants. Where is there a reasonable man, for instance, who without an absolute certainty that his baptism was valid, is not perfectly easy about its probability, although it is the most important of all things to him? In all human matters will men act in this way. It is possible that they may be stabbed by an assassin in the street; it is possible if they stay at home that their house may tumble down and bury them in its ruins. Do they think about these dangers? Not in the least; they are as easy as if God had revealed to them that these misfortunes should never happen. Why, then, should reasonable Christians allow themselves to be terrified by the simple possibility of mortal sin, when they have the strongest reasons for believing in their innocence? Why, then, do they not drive these useless fears out of their minds as if they were lying imaginations? Do they say that it makes them watchful? But an over great vigilance is imprudent, and an actual folly, like that of

Artemon. They run the risk of becoming a fable and joke among sensible men.

And notwithstanding all these extraordinary precautions that they take, the possibility of mortal sin is always the same. They can never obtain the absolute certainty they want, while they lose that which they possess, and the only result of their endless anxiety will be a perpetual trouble, which closes up their hearts, incapacitates them from running in the path of Divine love, for on that road those advance the most swiftly who are borne along by largeness of heart. "I have run the way of Thy commandments," says David, "when Thou didst enlarge my heart." Oh! how wise is he who, knowing by a moral certainty that he is in friendship with God and His well-beloved child, looks on it as a reality and acts accordingly, *i.e.* he strives to increase daily in His love, to hate his past sins more and more, not from the fear of not having had enough contrition for them, but that he may be perfect in charity. In this way he will far more surely obtain the security he desires, while in driving out fear he perfects himself in the exercise of that pure love which Scripture tells us "covers a multitude of sins." But some will now perhaps say, is there not a fear that these principles will lead us into the error of Protestants, who say that a person should look on his justification as a principle of the Christian

faith; at least, it seems safer to keep quite clear of their presumption to remain in fear and uncertainty? I know that some authors say this, but I see no reason in it; and it proves that those who maintain it have been alarmed at appearances, and have not gone to the root of the question. To show the imprudence of this opinion, let us remember that reason does not tell us in order to avoid one extreme we must run into another, and it very often happens that those who force themselves thus cannot endure it, and fall into the very extreme they tried to avoid, while if they had taken the middle course they would have remained in it. And further, if I am not mistaken, it seems very probable to me that this rash opinion of the heretics on the absolute certainty of justification, either originated or, at all events, was increased by the over timidity of orthodox writers, who reduced any kind of certainty to nothing. And it seems to me very probable that many Catholics, feeling their hearts crushed under the burden of these doubts, seeing that they are not reasonable, will begin by doubting this severe doctrine, then actuated by their aversion for it, and desiring to be entirely free from it, instead of taking the middle course will run into the opposite opinion, like a man who trying to avoid one ditch makes such a violent effort that he falls into another, instead of keeping

in the straight road as he intended. And in reality, Chemnitz, a disciple of Luther, writing against the Council of Trent, asserted that the teaching of the holy Council on justification, left the subject in a state of intolerable doubt; and he maliciously exclaimed, "Such is the effect of this doctrine, that terrified consciences seeking for consolation are thrown back into perpetual hesitation and frightful doubts about their reconciliation with God, and their eternal salvation." We may imagine the impression that this lying assertion produced on ignorant people. Bellarmine, in confutation of this calumny, brought forward many authors, who while professing the doctrine of the Council of Trent on justification, maintain the same opinion as I have done here.

They show that Christians have no solid reason for doubting their justification, that they should look on it as morally certain; and that is sufficient, not only to dispel all terrors of conscience, but also to let them enjoy the delights of Paradise in anticipation. "What think you," says Bellarmine, "about this way of reasoning: Catholics not having a certainty of faith about the friendship of God, therefore live in an agony of doubt and terrible anxiety? This reasoning is vicious: and the opposite is not less so. Catholics having no doubt or anxiety about their state of grace,

have a certainty of faith that their sins are effaced. The evil of this reasoning," he adds, "is that there is a middle course between the two extremes, which consists in a moral certainty from the understanding, and a loving confidence from the will. Well, then," says this great theologian, "our assurance is not from revelation but from charity, and the fruit of those good acts which it induces us to perform—an assurance which we may call a moral or conjectural certainty." True wisdom, then, does not require us to sacrifice our moral certainty, and live in doubt and anxiety that we may avoid Protestant error. It would be the way to make the Catholic doctrine odious to them, and induce them to cling more closely to their pretended certainty of faith. Let us admit that we possess that comforting assurance which I have shown you is just and lawful. We shall then oblige them to acknowledge, that they are doing wrong in indulging in excessive confidence as the only means of finding peace of heart, because Catholics find it equally in a belief, which is in conformity with all religion as well as with the Catholic faith.

CHAPTER XVII.

Terrifying doctrine on perseverance. It is an error for good people to be disturbed at it.

IF the faithful servants of God have no reason for fear about their present condition, at least they ought not to be easy regarding their perseverance and eternal salvation. In reality if we cast our eyes on the journey before us what do we see but every kind of snares, seductions, and dangers? If we look at ourselves, every part of our poor nature is both vicious and corrupted. "The flesh lusteth against the spirit," says the Apostle, and feeling against reason. Our understanding is blind, our will perverse, our whole being a terrible spectacle of misery, a chaos of trouble, altogether full of errors and sins. Have we meditated well on the eternal truths? Are our virtues solid, our resolutions well made? It may be so, but we always bear these treasures in earthen vessels which break at the least shock, and in an instant we lose our riches and are reduced to poverty. Like the statue which Daniel saw, whose limbs were composed of solid metal, but whose feet were of glass, so all our supernatural privileges rest on a nature which is most inconstant and weak, so that no one need bring the batteries of war to fight against the build-

ing; a little stone thrown at its base suffices to overturn it. Are the examples of such ruin rare? I can point to the fall of a David, a man "after God's own heart," as Scripture tells us, a man whose will was devoted to God, who could confidently say, "I shall never be moved." By what was he overthrown? A single glance! and this was enough to make him commit murder and adultery. And then we see Peter, chief of the Apostles, yielding not to the voice of a cruel tyrant, but to that of a servant maid. He denied his good Master, and to escape martyrdom became an apostate. I could quote many similar instances, for history is full of them, but let that of Origen suffice. Behold him, the greatest man of his day; illustrious for learning, sanctity, heavenly wisdom, and austerities, and burning with a desire to shed his blood for the faith.

O great God! who could have supposed that such virtue and merit could be "broken to pieces, carried away by the wind, and no place found for them?" Who could have imagined that such a hero would share the condemnation of an Arius or a Macedonius, instead of being held up for public veneration with an Athanasius, a Gregory, and a Basil? But he was only a man, and therefore he was liable to constant change. The gold and silver of his noble gifts were mixed up with the dust of our human nature; he stumbled in the path of faith, for-

sook it altogether, founded heresies which were condemned by the fifth General Council, and if we may believe a vision beheld by a holy man, is now in hell, leaving a terrible lesson to posterity. But why seek for examples among others? Do not we know from experience that our minds are weak and variable, our poor hearts most inconstant? When we have some consolation in God's service we think we are firmly rooted in His love, we set creatures at defiance, and cry out with the great Apostle, "Who then shall separate us from the love of Christ? I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

And scarcely has an hour passed away but, if some attractive object comes before us, or if the wind of temptation begins to blow, we are like another person, our interior state is so changed, our dispositions are so different, that we can hardly recognise ourselves. We fall from the third heaven to the depths below, and we cry out with St. Paul, "But I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin." Who then can walk fearlessly along this path sown thickly with snares and with perils

on every hand? Who can feel certain while on earth about his salvation, when David said in trembling, and each of us can repeat it after him, "There is but one step between me and death."

When people reason thus, and fill their minds with such thoughts, is it wonderful that many souls have neither the joy or loving confidence, which the Holy Spirit gives to those who walk in the path of God's love? What means can I use to lead them out of this state of anxiety, to accustom them to a loving and consoling communication with God? Shall I deny, or at least make light of the difficulties of salvation? I have no necessity for using such an artifice. Rather instead of making less of the picture that they lay before us, I will colour it more highly, declaring that they do not say enough about the dangers which surround us, or the number and strength of our enemies, or our terrible weakness. Yes, I acknowledge all that most entirely. I will say further that there is no man upon earth so solidly rooted in virtue who does not stand in constant and manifest danger of falling into perdition, but at the same time I maintain as an indisputable truth, that instead of allowing ourselves to be terrified by all this conflict we should look on victory as certain, and have a firm confidence that we shall persevere to the end in God's service.

CHAPTER XVIII.

If perseverance cannot be merited it can be obtained,
for all things are possible by means of prayer.

Do you ask me what means you must use to persevere? I answer one only; rely so little on your own strength that it will lead you to implore continually the help of God's omnipotent grace, and especially in the time of temptations. It is clearer than daylight that with such a protector we have nothing to fear, that no enemy can hurt us, nor ought to terrify us, and that our perseverance is safer in His hands than in ours; it would not be safe in ours. Let us say then with the Prophet, and with the same feelings which animated him, "Lord Thou hast crowned us with a shield of Thy good will." "I will deal confidently and will not fear." I approve of this, some one will say, it is quite reasonable. I should think it contrary to faith if I feared or even doubted when God is present to protect me, for if God be for us, as says the Apostle, who is against us?

But how can I know whether He will not refuse me this efficacious grace when the numerous crimes I see around, show me that He does not grant it to all, and when my conscience tells me that I am entirely unworthy of it? O my brother, what are you saying?

Take care not to throw a doubt on the infallible teaching of God's word, and render yourself more unworthy by this unbelief than by any thing else of the assistance of His grace. Who is to assure you, you ask, that your prayers are heard? Who will assure you? A witness who has never lied, God Himself; for you cannot be ignorant how many times He has pledged Himself to grant men all that they ask from Him which is good for them. "All things whatsoever you ask the Father when ye pray believe that you shall receive, and they shall come unto you;" "whatsoever you shall ask the Father in my name that will I do;" "ask and it shall be given you, for every one that asketh receiveth." Now I say where would be His truth if His thoughts did not accord with His words? Where would be His fidelity if He did not accomplish what He hath faithfully promised? "God is not as a man that He should lie, nor as the son of man that He should be changed. Hath He said then and will He not do? hath He spoken and will He not fulfil?" O my God, do not suffer a Christian to cast a doubt upon a doctrine which even the sacrilegious Balaam believed in stedfastly. He who has revealed to us the awful mystery of the Trinity, is the same God who has told us that whatever we ask with confidence for the good of our souls shall certainly be given; and I can perceive no good reason for believing the mystery and not the promise; for looking on a doubt

of the mystery as sinful, and a doubt of the promise as not so. Do you desire to make certain of your perseverance as far as you can? Never fail to offer up the following prayer daily:—"Lord God of my salvation, to whose favour alone we owe the happiness of serving and praising Thee worthily, illumined by Thy Divine light I clearly see that I can do nothing good in my own strength, and consequently I live in a continual danger of losing Thy grace and offending Thee; and fearing this misery more than all other evil, I humbly beseech Thee by Thy great goodness, and by the blood of Thy Divine Son, never to let it happen to me. O Father of mercies, either support me always in danger or cut short the thread of my life before the temptation comes which Thou foreseest shall overcome me. I would far rather lose this present life than offend Thee, who art my true life. Of all Thy gifts, my Lord, this is the most precious, and I beg for it, and wait for it from Thy great goodness. Confiding in Thy most faithful promises I doubt not that I shall obtain it. As to the possessions of this present life I am willing to be deprived of them. O my Divine Master, if Thou dost not help me in times of danger, on Thy judgment day I will justly complain of Thee. I will accuse Thee of having made specious promises only to deceive me. But why dream of impossibilities. Far be from

me not only the suspicion but the mere thought that Thou who art truth itself art capable of such unfaithfulness. I am very certain that whatever happens Thou wilt never refuse that assistance on which my salvation depends, and which will cost Thee neither pain nor labour; and I give Thee thanks beforehand as for a benefit already received."

If any one, I repeat, would make his final perseverance certain, let him offer up this prayer, or one like it, daily. Then let him be faithful in begging God's help in time of danger, and do it with unshaken confidence. If after a temptation during which he has prayed, he fears that he has given a consent to sin, let him re-assure himself with the thought that God cannot have failed in His promises at so critical a moment, when His glory or the salvation of a soul were concerned. "Lord," says St. Austin in a similar case, "If Thou dost not hear such prayers, what prayers wilt Thou hear?" In fact adds this holy doctor, "I know of nothing so re-assuring or which so completely dispels doubt as those words, 'Ask and ye shall receive.' Thou, Lord, hast made this promise, and who can fear to be deceived when he has the word of the Truth Himself?" The same father commenting on the words, "Blessed be God who hath not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me," adds, "As then you see that God does not refuse

you the grace of prayer, be sure He will not refuse you His mercy." The learned Suarez, after having examined this doctrine theologically concludes, that it is impossible that a man can ask for the friendship of God, with persevering prayer without obtaining it. The following are his words:—"I say then that if any one prays perseveringly for grace, he will certainly obtain it, and this is how the just man accustomed to the exercise of prayer can obtain perseverance until death." Then showing what this perseverance in prayer ought to be, he says:—"We must not merely pray now and then, but habitually during life, and especially on the occasions of having to keep the commandments, or to resist temptations, we must pray with real confidence." "In this way," he adds, "passing from one act to the other, or from prayer to action, we shall infallibly obtain perseverance." St. John Chrysostom had laid down this proposition before Suarez, saying, "It is impossible that a man who prays really to God, and earnestly begs for His help, can ever fall into sin."

CHAPTER XIX.

There are other reasons besides prayer which may reassure us on this point.

EVEN if God had not promised to give us every grace that we earnestly ask Him for, we should still have strong reasons for supposing that He will never refuse the gift of perseverance in His love to those who ask it. The first is that He is infinitely good ; for as there is no man hard hearted enough to refuse help to a mendicant, which he can give without depriving himself of anything ; how can we believe that God, whose gifts are without number, and whose treasures are inexhaustible, as the Church tells us, could close His heart against a poor creature in danger of losing eternal salvation, who has no other protector than Him, who earnestly implores Him to stretch out His hand and help him, which He certainly can do without cost. What an idea, I repeat, must we have formed of our great God if we can imagine Him to be guilty of such cruelty. Let us blush for shame, and be horrified with ourselves at having had the terrible presumption of placing the Father of Mercies below the least compassionate of men.

And let us listen while He Himself explains

this point to us in the Gospel of St. Matthew. "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in Heaven give good things to them that ask them."

St. Bernard has dared to say to Mary, whose mercy is only that of a creature, "Let him only deny thy goodness, O blessed Virgin, who hast invoked thee and whom thou hast not helped." How much more have we the right to say to our Heavenly Father, whose mercy is essential as well as infinite, "Let him only deny Thy mercy, O most clement God, who has implored it in his hour of need, and whose prayer Thou hast not heard." But we have lingered too long on a point universally believed. The second reason is His fatherly love, which leaves no room for doubting His gracious dispositions towards us. "The name of Father," says St. Austin, "inspires us with confidence, and emboldens us to ask for the graces we need; for if before we pray He has given us the glorious privilege of being His children, so that in all truth we can call Him Father, how can He be deaf to our prayers when we earnestly ask Him to keep us in this high rank, in this happy condition?" The third reason is because He has already bestowed on us gifts greater, than those we can ask from Him. "The great things Thou hast done in our favour," says St. Anselm,

“assures us that we may ask for lesser ones ; for what are all the graces that we shall have to ask for in the course of our lives, in comparison with Thy charity in clothing Thyself with our poor nature, and submitting for us to the infamous and agonizing death of the cross ?” And St. Paul dwells on this powerful reason in his Epistle to the Romans. In the eighth chapter he says, “He that spared not even His own son, but delivered Him up for us all, how hath He not also with Him given us all things.” In the fifth chapter he uses the same argument, but strengthens it by observing that when He gave us this unspeakable gift, we were His enemies, from whence he concludes that now being His friends, He will never refuse us graces far less precious. “If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son ; much more being reconciled shall we be saved by His life.” The fourth reason for confidence, and which is a weighty one, is founded on the pleasure which God has in granting our petitions. As His greatest desire is that we should persevere in His love—and this is the end of all His works, whether of nature or of grace—how can He refuse our prayers for the means of attaining it ? What should we think of a father, who having urged on his son to scientific studies, and spent a large sum every year for the purpose, should afterwards obstinately refuse to give

him a shilling towards the purchase of some book which was actually necessary for him; we should certainly say that he was most unreasonable. How then dare we suppose that God would act in this manner? St. Austin truly says, "He who has paid so dearly for us will not let us perish; certainly He has not redeemed us that He may lose us." Finally, it is certain, and I beg of you to weigh well what I am going to say, it is certain that prayer being a grace, we could not pray for perseverance in His love unless He inspired us, from whence I derive another and fifth reason for hoping without a doubt that He will give us what we ask from Him. Why should He inspire us to pray if He is not ready to hear our prayers? "It is Thou, O my God," says St. Anselm, "who hast inspired me with this good desire, but wherefore shouldst Thou inspire me with it if Thou didst not will to hear me?" "Assuredly," says St. Bernard, "he who desires a request to be made to him, cannot refuse it when it is presented." Whoever will weigh these various reasons with the attention they deserve, will see as clearly as daylight, that our petitions are certain to be heard. No, it is not possible that the Author of all good things, whose nature is goodness, whose riches are so great, that however abundant his generousities they are neither diminished nor exhausted; who has adopted us for His children;

who with His great tenderness has loaded us with blessings such as we should never have dared to ask Him for, it is not possible, I say, that he should now refuse our prayers for the gift most necessary for us, most pleasing to Him, which He inspires us to desire fervently—I mean an unshaken perseverance in His love. “Far be it from us,” cries St. Peter Chrysologus, “to entertain any doubt on this subject. A son can never fear that his father will refuse him the means of becoming virtuous.

CHAPTER XX.

The last means of setting all doubts on this head at rest is to pray with unshaken confidence.

ALL the reasons I have hitherto given, must certainly have convinced the mind that this confidence is right and lawful.

I will now give another which must dispel all doubts and uneasiness. This reason is that confidence is of the greatest advantage to us. It is a certain truth that the less doubt we have in the efficacy of our prayers, the more prompt God will be in hearing them. And if we had the courage to cast aside all distrust, then it is impossible anything can be refused us. This is, I say, a truth which the Holy

Ghost commands us to believe, giving us every assurance of it we can desire. "Behold the generations of men," he says to us in the book of Ecclesiasticus, "and know ye that no one hath hoped in the Lord and hath been confounded." "Hope confoundeth not," says the Apostle to the Romans. The royal prophet, in the thirtieth Psalm, dares to say to God, with holy boldness, "In Thee, O Lord, I have hoped, let me never be confounded." And in the thirty-sixth Psalm, desiring that our hearts should expand with confidence, he says to each of us, "Trust in the Lord, and He will do it." St. Bernard applies to confidence in God, that passage in Deuteronomy, "Every place that your foot shall tread upon shall be yours," and says your foot is your confidence, the more it advances the more it will obtain, provided you give it entirely to God. The same holy doctor, seeing in the vessels of the widow of Sarepta, which the prophet Elias filled abundantly with oil, a figure of confidence, speaks thus to God, "Confidence only, O Lord, attracts Thy notice. Thou wilt only pour the oil of Thy mercy into the vessel of confidence." And we may say, following out this beautiful idea, that as the oil abounded in proportion to the number and size of the vessels, and only ceased to flow when there were no more to fill, so is the generosity of God towards us in proportion to our confidence, and

it will only cease to flow when we cease to hope.

What can I add in confirmation of what I have already said? Our Lord one day assured His well-beloved St. Gertrude, that confidence forced Him, as it were, to hear a prayer. He said to her, "That assured confidence that any one has in Me, persuaded that I know His needs, that I have the power and will to help him, does such violence to My heart that I cannot abstain from giving him help." He said the same thing to St. Mechtilde in still more expressive words. "As much as any one confides in Me and relies on my goodness, so much he will obtain and infinitely more, because it is impossible that a man does not receive what he has worthily believed and hoped for." And all this is in accordance with the Gospel. When a sick man came to our Lord to seek a cure, to make him more fit to receive the blessing, He always required from him a lively faith. *Hast thou faith?* He would say, believest thou I can do what thou dost ask of Me? Go in peace, be it done to thee according to thy faith. Believe only, and thou shalt be cured. He further declared, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." After such promises what more can we want? I will only observe that the faith required by our good Master, is not only an act of the mind by which we believe He can

cure all our miseries, but a special act by which we believe without doubting, that because of His great goodness He really will do it. After such positive and abundant testimony, we ought to look on God as a Master, who is more desirous to gain our hearts by His goodness than we can believe ; we should go to Him in all our needs with confidence that He will help us, like the tenderest father or mother we have ever known, we should never fear a refusal or think we are a trouble to Him, but be certain that He is willing to grant what we ask with all His heart. And I say assuredly, that whoever will draw near to God with this true confidence, will always have his prayers heard, and will find Him so magnificent in His gifts that He will believe still further in His generosity. And how can it be otherwise, when men themselves, though so infinitely inferior to God in goodness and riches, sometimes show such great generosity. Who, for instance, knowing that a poor beggar so firmly believes in his kindness of heart that when he asks for help he is certain of being heard, would ever disappoint that poor creature ? Certainly he would not ; the very confidence is so flattering that he is obliged to listen, and he would be ashamed to show that he was less liberal than the poor man had believed him to be.

CHAPTER XXI.

Conclusion of this Doctrine.

THE five reasons that I have alleged have convinced us, that if we pray with assiduity and perseverance God will preserve us in His love. He has bound himself to it by numerous and positive promises ; and the very importance of the grace assures us it is not possible He can refuse us. And we know from the holy Gospels the power that faith possesses. Having, then, such strong reasons for hoping that my God will give me the gift of perseverance, who can venture to find fault with my confidence in Him, and blame me for the happy security which it gives me ? Is this rash ? Certainly not ; because it is founded on the goodness and fidelity of a Being on whom, St. Thomas tells us, "we cannot lean too much." Is it pride which prevents my being terrified by my many past sins ? But why should I fear, when my good Master did not except the greatest sinners who prayed to Him, from His general promises ? And St. Thomas teaches us that the power of prayer does not depend on our merits, but on the mercy of God, which is shed abroad upon all, and which will not even reproach those who claim it with

their past sins. Do you tell me that this is to run the risk of becoming proud, and of being less on our guard against dangers and falls? As to the first, I think I have already said enough to prove that security is not the presumption of pride—that prudence never requires us to give up a means of usefulness in order to avoid temptations to pride, because we have many other ways of resisting this sinful inclination. As to the second danger—which is feared—I really cannot see how the hope of avoiding sin by God's help, can make us less careful to fly from occasions of it. It is rather like a spur which goads us on continually to beg for divine protection as indispensable for our weakness, which, without its help, could not defend itself.

To show this truth more clearly, let us suppose, that God revealed to a young student that he would make great progress in knowledge, provided he studied very hard. I ask, would that foreknowledge of his success paralyse his exertions? Certainly, a judicious man would deny this, for it is evident that nothing is a greater stimulus in an employment, than to be sure one will succeed well in it. The contrary error arises from people confounding absolute certainty, which does not require any co-operation on our part, with that conditional certainty which requires us to correspond with it. Anyone who knows how to make the dis-

tion, will perfectly understand that, if the first leads to idleness, the last is a remedy for indolence ; for a man will be far more zealous in using the means when he is certain of attaining the end. To conclude what I have said, let us say, finally, that this opinion on the subject of which we treat is the best, and most in accordance with reason. After all the reasons I have given, is there still any one who can suspect or condemn my infallible confidence of obtaining the grace of perseverance from the divine mercy ? But what will he give me in its place ? “Unite,” he will say to me, “fear with confidence in such a way that, though begging constantly for perseverance, you do not feel sure of obtaining it.” This, then, in his opinion, is the surest and most useful way of acting.

Instead of asking help from my God with an assured hope, I am to beg for it with fear and anxiety lest I should be refused ; and he believes that I shall adopt this extraordinary idea. May God preserve me from it ! for if I follow such advice, I believe that, first, I shall do Him a great injury, casting a doubt on His paternal willingness to help me and His inviolable fidelity to His promises ; and my prayers would lose all their power without that unshaken confidence which gives life to them, and without which they are, if I may so speak, an inanimate corpse. Let any one who likes,

then, adopt this doctrine about prayer ; but as to me, I prefer that of the apostle St. James, who, in his Catholic epistle, exhorts each of the faithful to pray with faith, "nothing wavering," and declaring, moreover, that he who doubts shall not receive anything. I prefer to believe the learned Cassian, who pronounces this sentence: "He who doubts whether his prayer is heard, need have no doubt it is a useless one."

I prefer to be in accordance with the apostle of the Indies, St. Francis Xavier, who said: "Far from fearing to lose the protection of my God, I rather fear to make my doubts and distrusts an obstacle to His generosity." Having such authority, what do I care about those melancholy instances of men who, after having led holy lives for many years, have fallen very low, and are perhaps lost for ever. That does not shake my confidence, because I am certain that if they had gone to God in their time of danger, with that humble and confiding faith of which I speak, they would have escaped their misery. If they have perished it was because, relying foolishly on their own strength, they did not seek aid from the Father of Mercies, who would have upheld them if they had prayed as they ought. And those words of the royal prophet always were true, and will continually be verified: "They that trust in the Lord shall be as the

Mount Sion : he shall not be moved for ever that dwelleth in Jerusalem." Cardinal Bellarmine explains these words to mean, that they who truly trust in the Lord will be firm and unshaken, no matter what tempest rages against them, like Mount Sion, which is immovable, not only because it is a mountain, but because it is consecrated to God and very dear to Him.

CHAPTER XXII.

First charge against this doctrine—That it is heretical.—The answer.

Now, I must answer a charge that, with some apparent reason, is brought against this doctrine. "If these principles you lay down are true," it is said, "every one who serves God can, according to the absurd assertion of heretics, believe, as a matter of divine faith, that he will persevere to the end, for he knows for certain he often asked God to give him perseverance, and he knows by faith that our Lord has promised to give all we ask of Him. Then it undoubtedly follows that it is impossible God should refuse the grace, or that His word

should prove void." I deny that such a conclusion can be drawn from this doctrine. Perseverance in grace until death, is not a gift bestowed once for all, but a series of gifts which follow one after the other, and enable us to avoid sin. And it is certain that if we keep on asking for help, God will give it according to His promise. But we cannot be as certain about the whole of this assistance, though we may have prayed for it a hundred times, for God never promised that prayer in general should have such power. He has promised to help us at the present moment, but He has not promised to give all the necessary graces for the whole course of our lives. Cannot you understand? If He were to do this, we might dispense with prayer altogether, while we have been commanded to pray always, and never to relax in prayer. When we want some special grace from God, He often requires us to pray for a long time first; and how much more does He require it when we are asking for that long chain of graces on which our eternal salvation depends? This necessity of perpetual dependence on Him teaches us our utter powerlessness, our absolute inability of doing any good thing without Him. Nothing is better fitted to humble our pride and give glory to God; and this would never take place if He bestowed His gifts on us without our praying for them, or if it were

sufficient to pray once only. "Besides," says Bellarmine, "final perseverance is a compound thing, which can neither be asked for nor given in one day; and it is clear that to obtain it for certain, it does not suffice to pray once or often, but constantly, as our difficulties arise." As, alas! we have no divine promise that we shall always make a good use of our free will and avoid sin, we cannot have the certainty of faith about our perseverance; and as it is uncertain whether we shall be always faithful in prayer, it is also uncertain whether God will protect us in all dangers until our life's end. We must not doubt that God, who has promised to hear all our prayers, will keep His promise, because, as St. Paul says, "He who is faithful cannot deny Himself;" and, therefore, it is beyond all doubt that a Christian who prays daily, and especially in the occasions of sin, will be victorious in all his conflicts, and will persevere until death in a state of grace. But as we cannot be absolutely certain that this condition will be accomplished, therefore we cannot be certain the promise will be either. I will explain myself. Two things are necessary to keep us in grace—one on our part, *i.e.*, prayer, the other on God's part that He will hear us. And we have no promise about the first, but we have about the second: so that our perseverance is certain on God's part, but doubtful on our own; and this

condition is clearly explained, I think, by our Lord's words to the Samaritan woman: "If thou didst know the gift of God, thou wouldst perhaps have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water." And it is well to remark that the adverb *perhaps* does not belong to the verb *he would have given*. What related to God was not doubtful, but it certainly belongs to the verb *thou wouldst have asked*; that only was doubtful because it depended on man. But this lack of absolute certainty is no hindrance to him who desires perseverance in God's love more than all things; and as he has a sure means of obtaining it in prayer, he can firmly and confidently believe, that if he constantly uses this precious means, and never gives it up from sloth, he will be preserved until his last hour; and his confidence will be strengthened if, according to the prudent and salutary advice of Father Suarez, every time he prays to be kept from sin, either daily or when an occasion of sin is presented to him, he begs the grace of making the same prayer the following day and in all future dangers. Thus, by always asking for two gifts at a time from God, he is delivered from the present danger by the first, and by the second he will be secure of being infallibly delivered from the next danger. The same author adds with truth that we must pray not only that we may not sin, but also that we may persevere in prayer,

because the first brings us grace for the second, the second for the third, and so on. In this way we shall gain that perseverance in prayer on which perseverance in God's friendship depends.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Second Charge—Certain texts of Scripture inculcate fear. Answer.

THE second charge concerns some passages of holy writ which inculcate fear, such as "With fear and trembling work out your salvation;" "Serve ye the Lord with fear, and rejoice unto Him with trembling." After such words as these, and many similar ones, how can we, say our opponents, have a firm confidence of obtaining from our good God every grace that we need to persevere till death in His love and service? Some critical mind having laid before St. Teresa some passages from St. Paul, to prove that her frequent travelling was not befitting her sex, although she never took a journey except to found a new monastery, her Divine Spouse inspired her with an answer which quite applies to our subject. "Warn those who censure you not to dwell exclusively

on one text and forget the others which apply to the same subject. Are these people allowed to bind My hands in My works?" Can we have a better interpreter of Holy Scripture than its author? And here He declares unto us that we must not understand each word of Holy Writ according to its literal sense, but we must combine the texts which treat of the same subject to find out their meaning. Let us apply this rule to the passages that are brought against us, and it will be clear that Scripture sanctions the confidence I have recommended. The royal prophet certainly recommends it also when he promises that "mercy shall encompass him that hopeth in the Lord."

Solomon says, "Have confidence in the Lord with all thy heart." The Apostle of the Gentiles desires that it may abound in the hearts of the Romans. "The God of hope," he says to them, "fill you with all joy and peace in believing that you may abound in hope." He exhorts the Philippians to seek help from God in all doubts and anxiety, and then to rest in the arms of Providence with perfect security. "Be nothing solicitous, but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving let your petitions be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." The Prince of the Apostles in his turn

tells us not to be anxious because our Heavenly Father watches over us with loving care.

How can we make these passages, which positively recommend confidence, agree with those which inculcate fear? I answer that if we had no other reasons for seeing that they accord with each other, it would suffice for us to know that God, who dictated the Holy Scriptures, cannot contradict Himself, but in this instance we can confirm authority by reason. Would you then really see the meaning of these different texts? There are two principles engaged in working out our perseverance and attaining salvation, one in which we can have no confidence, and that alas is ourselves; for the Holy Ghost has said, "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man;" and it is to this that the texts about fear relate. The other leaves no room for doubt, and to it these texts about confidence belong, and that other is the Lord. If any one will attentively observe the different effects of these two principles, he will perfectly understand how we can unite confidence and fear.

If we look at our deplorable weakness we see that we can expect nothing from ourselves but offences and sins, and therefore we fear. But if we consider the power and goodness of our God, a confidence will spring up in our hearts that He will never forsake us if we are

faithful in asking for His help. We feel like a child, whose father holds him over the mouth of a well or out of a high window. He knows he cannot support himself in the air for a single minute, and if his father looses his hold he will have a terrible fall. But he is quite at rest, because he believes it to be impossible that a father who loves him tenderly will forsake him in such great danger.

Clearly understanding then this distinction between God and ourselves, let us discuss the texts brought against us. Whom does the Apostle tell to work out their salvation with fear and trembling? The same people whom he also tells to live in peace and not to be solicitous; for the two passages are in the same epistle, and addressed to the same persons. And he meant the trembling that might arise from this kind of fear, not from one which is restless and violent, which is incompatible with peace of soul and joy of heart. Unless we suspect the great Apostle of contradiction or inconsistency, we ought to interpret his words in one or other of the following ways: either he is exhorting a great fear united with equally great confidence, or else under the name of fear he means the active and ingenious zeal of delicate consciences for obtaining grace from God, or avoiding sin.

In the same way we must interpret the text quoted from the royal prophet, because with

him also we find fear and joy united together. We should then understand by fear that reverence with which the majesty of God inspires us, and which is easily united with confidence and joy.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Conclusion of this doctrine on the state of grace and perseverance.

HAVING now answered the arguments against this doctrine, I will draw from them two statements which may serve as a conclusion to this dissertation.

The first is that though we cannot be entirely certain of our constant fidelity in prayer, which is the indispensable condition of perseverance in Divine grace until death, I am convinced, that prayerful men who are accustomed to meditate on the great love of God and His wonderful goodness, can confidently and joyfully assure themselves, that their good Father, who has inspired them with such a great desire of keeping themselves in His grace, will also give them the gift of prayer until death, so that their desire may be fulfilled. Many really

spiritual persons are intimately convinced of this, and their conviction is so strong that the mere possibility of the contrary can neither destroy or even weaken it in them, so that they live in a security which at least leaves no room for fear. They dwell quietly in their own houses without ever thinking that it is possible the ceiling may come down on their heads, and they are as easy about this possibility, as if God had revealed to them that it would never happen. Let us recall an instance I have already quoted which applies with equal force in this place. I mean the child held in the air by his father. Well this child borne in his father's arms is no more afraid of a fall, than if he were walking on the ground. Why should not a man who knows that God is infinitely more loving than any earthly father, rest in His arms with the same confidence and security? Why should he fear or even suspect that God his good Father, is likely to withdraw His arm and let him fall into the depths below? Has He suffered others to perish? Then the royal prophet is mocking us when he says, that God is the protector of all that put their trust in Him, and that none of them shall perish, or else he must believe that among the multitude of the lost none trusted in Him without doubting, and the doubt led them to forsake Him. If then no one is lost except from want of confidence there is nothing in the examples of

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those who have perished to prevent us from serving the Lord with confidence and joy. The second statement which proceeds from this doctrine is, that we ought to take great pains to strengthen and confirm our confidence in God, because it is the greatest advantage both on our side and on that of God.

On our side experience teaches us that it is in man's nature to undertake an enterprise with far greater zeal, and to persevere in it more certainly, if he expects much advantage from it. How many generals have met with defeat because they were too certain of victory? True then is the teaching of St. Thomas, who says that the property of hope is to make a man zealous and vigorous in action. And prudent confessors when they are helping penitents who are weak, to form a firm purpose of amendment, recommend them especially to have a strong hope that God will not let them again fall into sin. And the thing is certain if this confidence is firmly rooted in their hearts.

But this confidence produces far greater and more powerful effects on God's side, for as He is goodness itself and delights as it were in being generous, nothing can please Him better than to receive glory from us for this attribute of His nature, when we have no doubt that in all our needs He will hear and help us.

If any one will do God the justice of believing in His incomparable goodness, and of

having perfect confidence in Him, he gains such an increase of love for Him, and is drawn so closely to Him, that it is impossible he can be forsaken, and if he perseveres in so doing he will certainly be protected in every danger. God has promised it in the 7th Psalm :—"Because he hath hoped in me I will deliver him. I will protect him because he hath known my name." The more we desire to advance in His love, the more highly we ought to think of His mercy, the more intrepid should be our confidence, and the more certain we should be of obtaining grace in all our needs. Therefore I cannot see from what prudent counsel doubts and inquietudes can spring, nor what advantages there can be found in them, which confidence is not far more certain to give.

CHAPTER XXV.

From whence is the third fear which good people experience about their salvation derived. Is it true that the number of the elect is small?

HAVING now put an end to the doubts and anxieties of some timid people about their present state or their future in this life, it only

remains for me to dispel the fears which arise about their eternal future. 1st. Because few are saved; 2nd, the difficulties of the road thither; 3rd, the unknown judgments of God; 4th, the impenetrable mystery of eternal predestination. It seems to me that I have already done it, for as we need nothing but sanctifying grace until death to attain eternal life, to have dispelled the exaggerated fears about losing it, will also dispel those about salvation. However, as fears upon this point do great harm to a certain number of minds, it will not be useless to discuss the point. Is it then true that few will be saved? Massillon says so in his celebrated sermon on the fewness of the elect. Many other preachers and moralists have said the same, though in a less exaggerated way; and this is perhaps the greatest obstacle placed in the path of confidence.

This assertion, then, is worthy of a thorough examination. First, is it of faith that few are saved? Certainly not. Faith teaches nothing of the kind. Is it a truth? I know not, and the preachers and authors of whom I speak know no more than I do; for if it is a truth, it is one of the next world, which can only be known by revelation. There can only be an opinion about it, more or less probable. But how did they dare to preach such terrifying doctrine without being certain of its truth? I believe that having to preach before a court,

or in great cities, and having to deal with presumptuous sinners, they thought they could not inspire too much fear; but I am persuaded that if they had lived in our days they would have been most careful not to put forward these conjectures, for the greatest sinners in our days, instead of having too much confidence have not enough, because they crown their sinful lives by dying in despair. There is no reason, then, it seems to me, to preach this conjectural assertion in these days, for it is not prudent to distress pious people without doing any good to sinners. No doubt those who have read Massillon, or the other sermons about the fewness of the elect, will be astonished at what I have said, and I foresee their objection. Are you aware, they will say, that the fewness of the elect is affirmed by Scripture, and by the testimony of the Fathers? I know that the theologians of whom I speak, quote some texts of Scripture and some passages from the Fathers. But does this prove that this opinion is of faith, or, at least a truth? Certainly not. Therefore I believe it to be only an opinion, and my readers, after having weighed my reasons, will judge. I ask what authority have those who preach this sentence to lay it before us as an article of faith. Is it the doctrine of the Church, or have they some clear texts of Holy Scripture, or the teaching of tradition? It seems to me they have none of these.

1st. Discussion.—Teaching of the Church.

The Church has never pronounced on this question. She knows that commentators maintain different opinions, and she has not interfered in their contentions. I am mistaken, her voice has been twice heard in this conflict, but what she has said is rather against, than for, the sentence we are discussing.

1st. She condemned Berruyer, for restricting the number of the elect, by saying they are the faithful only.

2nd. She has said in her prayers for the first Sunday in Lent, that the number of those who will attain to glory is known to God only. "O God, who alone knowest the number of the elect who are to be placed in supernal felicity."

2nd Discussion—The words of Holy Scripture.

Neither does Scripture teach us anything clearly on this terrifying matter. I know very well that the preachers of this sentence quote many texts in their favour; but I also know they have not the force of a proof. To prove a text it must be taken in its literal sense. In its other senses it can edify, affect, and instruct, but no good or strictly logical conclusion can be drawn; all interpreters agree on this canon. And the passages quoted by

these preachers, can only be taken in an attributed sense, for in their literal sense they do not apply to the point. To prove my assertion, I will quote these passages, and then I will expound their literal signification. 1st. It is said in St. Matthew (ch. xx. v. 16), "Many are called but few chosen." The same sentence is repeated in chapter xxii. v. 14 of the same Gospel. "All run indeed," says the Apostle to the Corinthians (1st Epistle, 9—14), "but one winneth the prize." St. John says, in the Apocalypse (ch. vi. v. 13), "And the stars from Heaven fell upon the earth, as the fig tree casteth its green figs when it is shaken by a great wind." St. Peter reminds us that in the deluge "a few, that is eight souls, were saved by water" (1st Epistle, 3—20). We read that when four of the five cities were consumed, three persons only were spared. In the book of Numbers we find that of the 600,000 men who went out from Egypt, two only entered the promised land, *i.e.* Caleb and Josue. Isaias says that "hell hath enlarged her soul, and opened her mouth without any bounds." The same prophet compares those spared from God's anger, "as if a few olives that remain should be shaken out of the olive tree, or grapes when the vintage is ended." Lastly, Jesus Christ tells us "Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat;

but narrow is the gate and strait is the way that leadeth to life, and few there are that find it."

Let us begin by investigating the use that has been made of the less important passages. We will then discuss the more formidable, and especially those which explicitly declare the sentence. First, then, I say that the texts taken from St. Peter, the Apocalypse, Genesis, Numbers, the prophet Isaias, and St. Paul, have nothing to do with the number of the elect, and consequently can only refer to the matter in an applied sense, which forms no proof. We have only to read the chapters attentively from which they are taken, to be convinced of this.

Thus, first, does the text from St. Peter refer to the fewness of the elect? Not the least in the world. The Apostle, in this chapter, is not drawing a comparison between the victims of the flood and souls that perish—between the people in the ark and those who are saved; he simply says, that baptism saves souls, like the ark of Noe saved the eight persons who were within it. I am willing, however, to admit the allusion that is supposed to be found here, but what does it prove? Were all those who perished in the flood lost? Such is not the opinion of St. Austin, St. Jerome, and the best commentators, neither is it that of the Apostle himself, because he assigned the greater

number of these unhappy beings to limbo, from whence our Saviour had released them. 2nd. The text from the Apocalypse proves nothing on the point. Among interpreters, some understand by the fall of the stars, the multitude of apostates which Antichrist will cause. Others take the words literally, as in accordance with our Lord's own predictions, "the stars shall fall from Heaven;" but no one that I know of, imagines that they allude to the condemnation of souls. The history of the ruin of the four cities is also foreign to the question. It is a fact recording God's justice, or rather His clemency, because He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten." It is true that only Lot's family escaped, but what does that prove? Its application to the fewness of the elect is not indicated by the Holy Ghost, even by the nature of the story. And no commentator has seen the matter in this literal sense.

The other passage in Genesis, on the entrance into the promised land, bears along with it no proof, for to give it that, it would be necessary to take in a figurative sense, that which is clearly only literal. And here again I can point to the silence of interpreters. Isaias says that "hell hath enlarged her soul and her mouth without bounds," but what does he mean by the word hell? Interpreters say he was speaking of the cemetery in the valley

of Hennon, and this leads us to believe the prophet was speaking of temporal calamities. As to the second passage of Isaias, where he speaks of the olives and grapes that have escaped the gleaners hand, I answer : first, interpreters understand it to mean the time of Antichrist ; secondly, I reply by bringing another text of the same prophet which refers to the number of the elect, and is in opposition to the first. He says (ch. LIII. 11), speaking of our Saviour, " Because His soul hath laboured, He shall see and be filled." And with what does His Father promise He shall be filled, if not with the salvation of souls, the object of His labours and His sufferings ? And, then, He will content Himself with the olives and grapes left by the gleaner ? it is an absurdity. Thirdly, in all parables which treat of the good and wicked, the first are compared to what is best, and the last to what is worst. Look at the parables of the cockle and wheat, the fishes, the corn and chaff. And here it would be quite different if it applied to the elect and condemned, therefore there is no question of them in this passage.

St. Paul says that in the race one only wins the prize. If this means salvation, there is no one among the elect but our Blessed Lady. Is it not a saying, that a thing which proves too much proves nothing ? But St. Paul meant perfection, and not salvation. The very com-

parison itself proves it: for he who receives the prize does not obtain it because he runs, for they all run, but because he runs better than the others.

We now come to those texts which appear to be more positive, and which therefore deserve a more serious examination. They are from the Gospel, and we will discuss them with especial care. Jesus Christ assures us in St. Matthew, chap. 7, that many men walk in the broad road which leads to their perdition, and that few follow the narrow path which leads to life. *Answer*: If I can bring other words of our Lord's which are entirely opposed to these, it will be clear that the first do not prove what it is imagined they do; otherwise we should have to say that our Lord did not always speak consistently, which would be a blasphemy. And here is a passage which I beg my readers to compare with that which is brought against me. "Few will be saved," He says in the first, *pauci*; "many, *multi*," says He elsewhere, "shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down in the kingdom of heaven." (St. Matth. viii. 11.) The words brought forward, then, need explanation. Therefore, either our Saviour was speaking of the mass of mankind—and then it is certain that many are lost—or else He was simply referring to the Jews, of whom few believed in His word; and this version seems

the most probable, as He was speaking of His own time and not the future. This is the opinion of Father Salmeron on this passage.

We have now only to examine those parables where the terrible sentence is found in so many words. What answer is there to this most positive declaration: "There are many called but few are chosen?" None if it be detached from its context, but taken in connection with that, the heart is speedily relieved. When there is a difficult phrase in a discourse it is necessary to consider it in its relation to the whole, and this is the only means of finding out its real meaning.

First Parable in St. Matt. chap. 20.

Our Lord tells us that many that are first shall be last, and the last first. It was at the end of His discourse, and that it might be better understood He related the following parable to His hearers: "The kingdom of heaven is like to a householder, who went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard: and having agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into the vineyard. And going out about the third hour he saw others standing in the market-place idle. And he said to them: Go you also into my vineyard, and I will give you what shall be just. And they went their way. And again

he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did in like manner. But about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing, and he said to them: Why stand you here all the day idle? They say unto him: Because no man hath hired us. He saith to them: Go you also into my vineyard. And when evening was come, the Lord of the vineyard said to his steward: Call the labourers, and pay them their hire, beginning from the last even to the first. When, therefore, they were come that came about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. And when the first also came, they thought that they should receive more; and they also received every man a penny. And, receiving it, they murmured against the master of the house. But he answering, said to one of them. Friend, I do thee no wrong. Didst thou not agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way. I will also give to this last even as to thee. So shall the last be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen." Let us first explain the meaning of this parable. According to all the Fathers, the householder is God, the vineyard is the Church, the workmen are those invited to labour in it, the penny eternal life. The labourers are sent in at different hours, and these hours are the different times of life, and the evening is the judgment. The wages

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being equal, indicates that God has less regard to the length of time than to the good use we make of it; and, therefore, on the last day, the first may be the last and the last first. I ask, can the consequence that few men will be saved, be drawn from this discourse? It seems to me that, logically, it is just the contrary, because all those spoken of in this parable were saved. But, then, I shall be asked, "What is the meaning of the last sentence?" I reply to my opponents: Anything you like, provided it is not this meaning on which we differ, for it is impossible our Lord could have reasoned in this manner, all obtain heaven, as you see then there are few of the elect. If I must give my opinion, however, it seems to me that these last words have reference to what has gone before; and, to prove it, they are connected by the particle *for*. The sense in which I take it is this: The first who came in great numbers were, however, the last; for though all were called to be first, nevertheless few obtained it. If this interpretation be rejected, it does not matter. It is certain that the one which I defend is approved by most of the Fathers, and, besides, so obscure a text can prove nothing.

Second Parable in St. Matt. chap. 22.

A king invited many people to his son's marriage feast. The guests refused to come.

Others were called, and the banquet-hall was filled; but one man came in without a wedding garment. The king ordered him to be cast into exterior darkness, where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth. After this sentence he added: For many are called, but few are chosen.

Everyone agrees that this means heaven; but among the large number of guests, one only was banished. The sentence that ends this parable cannot, therefore, have the severe meaning that is given to it. It relates to the multitude of the Jews who, though the first invited, would not come, and were replaced by a small number of faithful souls; for we should remark that our Lord speaks of the present and not the future. I confine myself to these two parables, because all the others that are brought forward are rather *for* instead of *against* the great number of the elect. Let us indicate them rapidly: it will suffice to make the thing certain. Of ten virgins five went into the banquet; of three servants to whom the Master gave talents, two deserved the reward; there were less cockle than wheat in the harvest field, for we separate that which is least; if there was much chaff, there were still more grains of corn; there are less goats than sheep in a flock; and when a fisherman empties his net he keeps more fishes than he throws away. If some minds do not like these

explanations, it does not the less prove that the words are not clear, and, consequently, it is wrong to bring them forward in support of so alarming an opinion. Moreover, we know that parables were employed as illustrations rather than doctrines, and cannot therefore determine a disputed point.

Now, let us see whether the authority of the Fathers will prove more than Scripture does.

3rd Discussion : the Opinion of some of the Fathers.

If it were the common opinion of the Fathers that the number of the elect is few, we should admit it to be a truth ; but as there are but isolated instances among them, it still remains an open question of controversy ; and as our opponents can only quote about half a dozen on their side, we may believe the others are against it ; for on such a grave question, which they must often have met with, their silence is worthy of notice. But is it certain that my opponents have even this small number of the Fathers on their side ? This I will now consider.

1st Quotation.—St. Jerome says, in his Commentary on Isaias (24-13), that among a hundred thousand sinners who wait for death to be converted, there is scarcely one who is saved. I acknowledge that he says that ; but I deny that it follows the greater number of

men are lost. In the Church there are a very large number who do not need conversion for their salvation, and there is perhaps only one kingdom (which I do not wish to name) where the mass of sinners wait for death to be converted. Everywhere else the majority come to confession, receive absolution, and approach Holy Communion from time to time, from which we may form a legitimate presumption in their favour. As to the sinners in the country of which I made an exception, as they have not all the means of salvation which they have a right to hope for, I think they will receive especial graces at the time of death. At the most, the opinion of a single Father is not of much authority.

2nd Quotation.—St. Chrysostom, preaching to the people of Antioch, asserted that of all that multitude there were not a hundred that were in the way of salvation. *Non possunt, in tot millibus inveniri centum qui salventur.* What does that prove? We know that the population of Antioch was then composed of idolaters—Arians, Pelagians, semi-Pelagians, and of bad Catholics. It is clear that such men were not living in a manner to render their salvation probable. And we have again to remark that the Saint was preaching of the present and not of the future. I add that to draw a conclusion from a particular case for a general one is a sophism.

3rd Quotation.—A terrifying sentence is borrowed from St. Gregory the Great : “ It sometimes happens that those who embrace the faith are not among the number of the elect.” *Non numquàm etiam hi ad fidem veniunt qui ad electorum numerum non pertingunt.* The answer is not a difficult one. No one denies that Catholics are sometimes lost, but sometimes does not mean often. This sentence, then, is foreign to the matter of which I treat.

All the proofs brought forward to prop up the argument that few are saved being valueless, it is probable that our opponents will find a larger company in heaven than they think. But let us take the matter at its worst. If it is true that few men are saved, it is because there are few who are diligent in prayer, and who pray with that unshaken confidence to which nothing is refused. If all would fulfil this easy condition, all would persevere in Divine grace until death, and consequently would be saved. If then any one who prays with confidence will neither sin or perish, the multitude of those who sin and perish should increase our confidence, instead of destroying or diminishing it, in the same way as in the time of a pestilence, we see those people die who refuse to apply certain remedies, and this sight instead of depressing us, urges us on to use the remedies to save ourselves. Some one, one day asked the Son of God : “ Lord, are they few

that are saved?" But He said to them, "Strive to enter in by the narrow gate." And if I rightly understand this wise answer, it seems to say that it signifies little to us whether the number of the elect be great or small, but it signifies a good deal that we should do what is necessary to obtain eternal life.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Discussion of other reasons which terrify pious people about their salvation.

As to the fear which arises from the difficulties of salvation, I say grace can clear them away, and there is no one who asks for grace who cannot overcome them. This is in truth the teaching of our Divine Lord. Having said one day that it was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, His astonished Apostles asked Him, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus answered them, "With men it is impossible, but not with God." I cannot agree that the necessary conditions for salvation are so difficult as to give rise to fear and uneasiness. I will say further, fearless of

making a mistake, that our weak nature could not ask for, nor could Providence have given us more easy ones. In reality what are these conditions about which we alarm ourselves so much? There are two, and nothing can be more easy than they are, to detest our sins and to confess them to the minister of Jesus Christ. Oh if human justice were only as easy, our prisons would soon be empty, and if some criminal rejected these conditions, or submitted to them with bad grace, the whole world would look on him as mad. But we know not what judgment God will pass upon us, and is not that awful and terrible? I know the judgments of God are hidden, and utterly impenetrable to our minds, but I also know and maintain they are guided by His infinite goodness and accord with it; and that should be enough to lead every servant of God to look on God's judgments, rather as a matter of rejoicing to the soul than of fear. Such was the feeling of holy King David, who in Psalm 118 says to God that His judgments are delightful; then, that in them he has hoped exceedingly; lastly, the remembrance of them comforts him. I can also point to St. Angela of Foligny, who was allowed to see by an especial light the goodness of God in His judgments, and she was filled with such joy and confidence, that from that time she appealed to Him by His judgments as well as by His blood and His death.

Let us now speak of predestination, that subject of terrible apprehension. How can I be in peace, says a timid soul, when I know not whether I am among the elect or the condemned; and if I am among the latter what use is there in my praying to God and hoping in His mercy? No matter what I do His eternal decree will be carried out. I answer first, that he who speaks in this way can perfectly assure himself of his safety, despite of his ignorance, and on these grounds: whoever perseveres till death in God's friendship is certainly predestined, otherwise God would condemn His friends, which is contrary to the Apostle's words: "There is now therefore no condemnation to them that are of Christ Jesus." And this timid person to whom I am speaking has many just reasons for believing that he will persevere in God's friendship until death. These reasons have been already pointed out, and I will return to them again, but meanwhile let us conclude that we can already have a probable assurance of attaining eternal life. Secondly, I answer that the idea, "If I am among the condemned there is no use in praying to God and trusting in His mercy, for I shall perish all the same," is equally absurd as if one said, "If I am among the condemned, even though I persevere in grace until death, I shall still be lost." It is impossible that a man who is in the state of grace when death comes

can be lost ; it is also impossible that he will fall from that blessed state if he perseveres until the end in imploring help from God, and trusting in His mercy. The two conclusions that we must draw are then these : First, If I am lost I certainly shall not die in a state of grace, and if I die in a state of grace certainly I shall not be lost. Secondly, If I am lost I shall have died out of the state of grace, because I did not persevere until death in prayer and confidence, and if on the contrary I practice both, certainly I shall be saved. The whole difficulty of this question depends, as you see, upon fidelity in prayer, and in consequence whoever wishes to make sure of his eternal predestination should adopt the following practice :—Let him be faithful in begging God many times every day to grant him His all powerful grace to overcome temptation, to fly from the occasions of sin, to call upon Him in every time of danger, and to fulfil all the essential conditions for perseverance, and he may be certain that his prayers will be heard. This is, it seems to me, the counsel given to us by Holy Church by so often placing in our lips that best of prayers, “O God, come to my assistance ; O Lord, make haste to help me.” Let him repeat this beautiful prayer many times a day, but especially when he is in danger of offending God. And in doing so let him carefully avoid, according to the counsel of the

Apostle St. James, all doubt and hesitation, and have a perfect faith, because the effects of prayer are generally in proportion to the confidence of him who offers it. The more he hopes for, the more he will obtain, and when he sees he has succeeded, his confidence will increase more and more. Instead of making himself uneasy about the result of his prayers, about which he has a certain promise, let him only be afraid that he has not prayed with sufficient assiduity and confidence, because about that he has no promise from God. Let him be as perfectly at rest concerning his good Father's part, as he would be if his eternal future were in the hands of his earthly father, and still more, because God's goodness is incomparable, and *no one*, as Tertullian says, *is such a father as He is*.

Finally, let him often use this just and easy reasoning with himself, If I continue until death to trust entirely in my God, I shall certainly receive all the help I need for my salvation from His goodness, and there is nothing to prevent my hoping now and until the end that grace will never fail me ; rather I have many reasons for counting on it, and therefore leaning on His goodness, which is most certain, I can look on my perseverance in the love of God until my last sigh, as certain. Let us then live, oh yes, let us live in joy and peace under the keeping and protection of our

heavenly Father, "casting all your care upon Him for He careth for you." Let us have no fear or doubt of His assistance in the important matter of our salvation, There is nothing more displeasing to Him than this doubt, because it is against His goodness, which is of all His attributes the dearest to Him, as well as the most glorious and the sweetest. If anything can estrange Him from us, it is to see that we know Him so ill, and think that His heart is so narrow. Would you have proofs of this, listen to those indignant words which the distrust of the Israelites in the desert provoked from Him, "How long will this people detract Me?" See on the contrary in the Gospel the words addressed to the centurion, which show us plainly how much confidence can obtain from His generosity, "As thou hast believed so be it done unto thee."

Happy then, a thousand times happy is he, who has this just confidence in Divine mercy deeply engraven in his heart, and who keeps it faithfully until his last sigh in this world. I want no other proof of his predestination than that. I am so sure of his salvation that I will willingly let my soul be with his. O God, who art full of goodness, whom Thy Apostle has so truly called the God of hope, I supplicate Thee by Thyself, namely, by that infinite goodness which is Thy very essence, to grant me this precious gift, which I look upon as

the key of Thy treasures and the source from whence doth flow all Thy other gifts, an unreserved confidence. Grant, O my Lord, by Thy grace that I may ever think well of Thee. Grant that I may not discredit Thee as I have done until this day by my unworthy distrust. Let me only look on Thee as pure love and pure goodness. Let me expect my salvation from Thee with more certainty than I should expect it from the best of friends, or the most tender of fathers if it depended on their power. Let me throw myself into Thy arms with an unreserved trust, placing there all my hope, living there as in the surest resting-place I can find, reposing there without fear or anxiety. Yes, my dear Lord, I believe but still too feebly, help me, I pray Thee, to cure my unbelief. Give me that confidence which Thou hast the right to expect from me. "In peace I will sleep and take my rest."

"I say," says St. Bernard, "Thou hast placed me in hope, and not between fear and hope, that miserable place which I have occupied until now, and where I have only found unrest and anxiety."

CHAPTER XXVII.

Why is it that ascetical writers differ on this point?

“**THAT** perfection,” says St. Thomas, “which in God is one and simple, is only found partially in creatures; and sanctity, which has its source in Jesus Christ, flows from Him into His elect, as members of the body of which He is the head, in such a manner that each shares some measure or another of it, according to the good pleasure of this divine head.” This truth cannot be better explained than in the words of the great Apostle. “Every one hath his proper gift from God, one after this manner, another after that. But all these things one and the same spirit worketh, dividing to every one according as He will; for as the body is one and hath many members, all the members of the body, whereas they are many, are one body; now you are the body of Christ.” And from this diversity of heavenly gifts and spiritual instincts it happens that pious persons take, one, one path, another, another, according as they are led thereto by the Holy Spirit. Each has his particular character of sanctity, and this is the meaning of the Church in her office for confessors, when she says of each of them, “And there was not found the like to him.” What can be more worthy of admira-

tion than that gentle elasticity of grace which guides different minds so sweetly? What is more fitting to enhance the beauty of the Church, whose symmetry is far greater when the component parts are varied and numerous? And yet it is one of the greatest causes for disturbances to novices in the path of virtue. When they see a great many souls tending towards perfection by different ways to their own, they begin to doubt whether their own is the best, or else they condemn without mercy the conduct of every one else, which is very different from the spirit of the great Apostle, who said, "So in all the Churches I teach, as God has called every one so let him walk;" and again, "Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not, and he that eateth not let him not judge him that eateth."

He adds that he who does not act thus, is like one member of a body complaining it may not perform the functions of another, or who despises the others because they are differently employed to it. And as the paths of the spiritual life are varied according to different *attraits* and characters, some, for instance, having a leaning towards severity, others towards gentleness; some to the contemplative life, others to the active; some to solitude, others to the service of their neighbours, it is not surprising that on the question of which we have been treating, all opinions are not the

same. Thus we shall find some persons, who having an *attrait* for serving God by a holy sorrow and humble fear, disapprove of the holy joy and loving freedom that others have in their intercourse with God, and look on it as a delusion. They reason against it in a manner which I shall answer, not that it is of a nature to affect unimpressionable minds, but because it gives me an occasion of throwing further light upon, and strengthening what I have already said, in favour of that free, joyous, and confiding way of treating with God.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Does the greatness of the Almighty and our littleness forbid all familiarity with Him ?

AN objection is made that familiarity with God ill befits His infinite greatness and our own littleness, of which we should never lose sight, and which should make us come into His presence trembling and bowed to the earth, believing ourselves unworthy of treating Him with the familiarity of children. Does not a subject, dazzled by the splendour surrounding his monarch, often come before him so over-

come by confusion that he does not know what to say ; how much the more awe and reverence ought we to feel in addressing the greatest of kings, Almighty God Himself. I reply that this manner of considering God has something false or, at least, incomplete about it. In order to form a just idea of Him, we must not consider Him only in His nature as the creator and sovereign Lord of all things, but as He has chosen, out of His infinite goodness to be known to us, as our Father and our Friend. Now if we accustom ourselves to consider Him under this twofold aspect, we shall clearly understand how, without losing the respect we owe Him, we may be, at the same time, familiar and at our ease. I willingly grant that the man is ignorant and bold who uninvited, and confiding in his own merits alone, would treat familiarly so great a king ; but I deny that that man is either, who convinced of his nothingness and unworthiness, emboldened by the invitation of his loving Father, and knowing the value of such precious intercourse, approaches Him with perfect freedom.

Otherwise all Christians could be accused of presumption who, at the invitation of their Lord, concealed beneath the sacramental veils, dare to receive Him with their lips and into their hearts, for can any act of familiarity be greater than this ? To make it clearer, let us imagine a great king who weds a portionless

maiden, as Assuerus espoused Esther, in Holy Scripture. Should she who is elevated to so high a dignity content herself only with submission and respect, not daring to show her spouse any mark of tenderness? All would agree, that though the queen ought never to forget her lowly birth, that she owes everything to her husband, and though she is his companion she is not his equal; still she ought never to slight his affection by refusing him the love and familiarity to which he has a right, and we may be sure the king himself would be displeased if she was thus reserved, scarcely daring to raise her eyes in his presence, or to speak to him without trembling. He would certainly reproach her, and tell her that he married her to be his wife and not his slave, and that if he had wished to be treated as a master he would have left her in the humble condition of her birth. Such is exactly our position as regards God. He, the sovereign ruler of the world, out of his pure and wonderful goodness has deigned to choose us for his spouses, His friends, and His sons and daughters.

What, therefore, ought to be the feeling of man, so wonderfully beloved, and raised to so high a rank by his Creator? How great should be his amazement at the Divine goodness, how deep his humility in acknowledging his own unworthiness, how profound his re-

spect in speaking to his Heavenly Friend, how exact his care in avoiding every word or act displeasing to Him. But why, let me ask, should we not unite filial love to these feelings of amazement and veneration, he must indeed do so if we believe St. Bernard and St. Peter Chrysologus.

“To obtain a proper appreciation of your own humility,” says the first, “appreciate the goodness of your God.” “Go, my little children,” says the latter, “whither charity calls us, whither love attracts us, and whither affection invites us, our hearts are moved at the thought of God our Father, let our voices give Him that title, let our spirits so proclaim Him, let all within us answer to grace and not to fear, because He who, once our Judge, has become our Father, wishes to inspire us with love and not with terror.” Thus the spiritual man should say to himself, if I am so little in God’s sight, that instead of deserving to be called His friend or His child, I do not even merit to be called His servant, and ought to live before Him in fear and trembling; but if, at the same time, He has deigned, out of His incomparable goodness, to adopt me, and takes delight in seeing me act as becomes His friend and His child, without servile fear, and in loving familiarity, why should I repulse His love, and put restraint upon myself in my intercourse with Him? Would humility sug-

gest such a line of conduct? The truly humble man believes himself unworthy of the gifts of God, and I am so deeply convinced of my own unworthiness, that no feelings of fear could deepen my impression, thus having no good reason for refusing the liberty He gives me, and having learned by experience the advantage of it, I will use it, with humility certainly, but without constraint. I will stand before Him with a childlike spirit, and great as He is, I will go to Him as my indulgent Father. "Would it not be a folly," writes Denys of Syracuse, treating of another subject, indeed, but in language singularly appropriate to the present, "to ask favours from some one and then to reject them when granted?"

Thus respect and familiarity in our daily communications with God, unite and harmonize without detriment to either, for such familiarity is ever humble, whilst respect is ever trustful, and thus neither impairs nor diminishes the other. In proof of this, I would point to the example of our Blessed Lady, though she perfectly comprehended the infinite greatness of her Son, and though none so deeply venerated His person as she did, she still assumed all the rights of a mother, caressing Him and embracing Him as if He were an ordinary child, and even asking Him on the occasion of her three day's loss, "Son, why hast Thou so done to us?"

You may say this comparison is not a just one. I answer that it is according to its proportions. You say that Mary is the mother of Jesus. Certainly she was, but by gratuitous election, and we must never forget that we also are His children in the like manner. Therefore if she made use of her maternal rights without displeasing Him, we may also fearlessly make use of the rights which belong to us as His children. A peasant who comes into the presence of his king without permission is presumptuous, but if he is only summoned by his monarch it is respect and obedience in him. If humility ever inspires us with servile fear, I do not scruple to call it mistaken humility, which ought to be corrected. Remember the prodigal son in the Gospel. When he bewailed his misery at a distance from his father's house, he longed to return to it, were it only as a menial. "I will arise," he said, "and go to my father, and say to him, father I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, I am not now worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." But when he was again in his father's arms, and received with such unexpected tenderness, he still confesses that he has sinned and is not worthy to be called his son; but he speaks no more of becoming his hired servant. As St. Austin expresses it, "Whilst the prodigal wanted bread, he would

willingly have entered his father's house as a menial, but after having received his pardoning kiss, he disdains so servile a state with noble generosity.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Is there any opposition between respectful fear and joyous and familiar love?

It is said that fear and a joyful and familiar love are incompatible, and that if we are to be familiar with God, we must cast aside that fear so often and so strongly recommended in the Scriptures. "Fear the Lord, all ye his saints," writes the Psalmist.

This is not solid reasoning, and to show this, I will give you a true idea of the fear of God considered in general, and upon the fear of God spoken of in Scripture; once understand these and you will smile at this severity which fills you with false alarms. First, the word fear, considered in its general and in its natural sense, expresses that perturbation and uneasiness which is caused by the aspect of anything terrible or threatening, such as an earthquake which shakes our dwell-

ing ; an enemy rushing towards us sword in hand ; or the rocks upon which the stormy waves beat, whilst we are tossed to and fro upon them. An evil at a distance, however great it may be, never inspires us with a fear of that nature, but only with a tranquil sort of hatred and aversion.

Fear is not only inspired by evil itself, but the person capable of inflicting it, and who, according to the ancient philosophical axiom, "can never be loved by the being who fears him." St. Thomas goes farther and says that far from being loved, such a man is rather hated. If our fear of God as our Judge is not restrained within due bounds, if it leads us to fear punishment as the greatest evil, and to dread it more than sin, St. Austin condemns it as the enemy of God's justice.

"He who feels thus," writes the holy doctor, "would prefer that God should not be just rather than be condemned and punished, such a one," he adds, "wishing what is impossible, that God should not be just, would also desire to destroy God if he could. Plato the philosopher, speaking of the baneful fear of God, calls it a superstition, and considers it to be worse than impiety. "The unbeliever," he says, "denies God, the superstitious man wishes that He did not exist."

It is also certain that a transition from this kind of fear to unbelief is easy ; for instance,

an habitual sinner who refuses to forsake sin, and is tormented by sorrow and remorse, is forced into one of two extremes, he either disbelieves that there is a God, or thinks that if there is, He does not concern Himself with what passes on earth.

Fear has various other meanings in ordinary language. Sometimes it means the respect that is felt for one who can revenge himself when offended; sometimes the dread inspired by some possible calamity, or again the watchfulness which is employed in avoiding the obstacles which impede the way towards a certain enterprise. But none of these are real fear, for they do not fill the soul with anxiety nor banish love. For instance, the son of a great king, knows his father will punish him severely if he is disrespectful towards him; we say, though it is incorrect, that the prince fears both his father and the punishment he can inflict, and that from this fear springs a deep respect and a firm resolution of never offending him, but as he has no present apprehension this fear neither troubles him nor lessens his filial love and confidence. If on the contrary he deserved punishment, and saw it hanging over his head, his fear of both his father and the penalty he had incurred would really and truly be fear.

On the fear of God I have these remarks:
1st. That God is too good in Him-

self to be an object of fear, except that He is the punisher of sin. 2nd. That the fear of God is often considered by theologians to mean also the fear of sin, and is divided into servile and filial fear. St. Austin explains it thus : “ Filial fear is a horror of sin, because it is an evil in the sight of God whom it injures and offends ; servile fear is a horror of sin because it is an evil to man, because it is displeasing to him on account of its deformity, and because of the penalties attached to it.”

Now though the first of these two fears is the nobler, because produced by charity, we must allow, according to the doctrine of the Council of Trent, that the second is praiseworthy and inspired by God. It is only blamed by the fathers, when it exceeds its due limit, dreading the penalty more than the sin ; leading the sinner to say I would sin again were I not afraid of punishment. 3rd. That the Holy Scriptures when they praise the fear of the Lord do not always mean in its natural sense, and in as much as it is a perturbation of mind caused by the terror of impending evil. The fear they speak of means generally the wonder, respect, and submission due to God for His infinite majesty, or the firm resolve and eagerness to avoid all that could offend Him. We see this in a passage of Scripture which speaks of this fear as actually pleasing and joyful. “ The fear of the Lord is honour,

and glory, and gladness, and a crown of joy. The fear of the Lord shall delight the heart, and shall give joy and gladness, and length of days." Besides if fear did not mean something else than dread of having incurred the enmity of God or of losing His grace, our Lord and His saints would not have experienced it; yet Isaias expressly foretold of the Messiah that he should be filled with the spirit of the fear of the Lord, and the royal prophet says the fear of the Lord is holy, enduring for ever and ever.

We must therefore understand according to St. Thomas that this fear means that profound reverence for God, and that submission to His decrees which our Lord and His saints possessed in so much higher a degree than ourselves. If the fear which disturbs the soul was a precept, we ought to seek after it instead of avoiding it, and nourish it instead of casting it out, and yet both Job and Jeremias ask Almighty God to preserve them from it: "Let not His fear terrify me," says the former. "Be not Thou a terror unto me," are the words of the latter. The holy Apostle St. Paul himself expressly tells his disciple Timothy, "That God has not given us the spirit of fear but of power, and of love and of sobriety."

What more can I say for I would omit nothing to fortify you against this mistaken fear. If it is fear that is incumbent on all, it

follows that all of us ought to be conscious of being at enmity with God, or exposed to the imminent and almost inevitable danger of losing His grace, since those are the conditions attached to the fear of God, of which I have just been speaking.

Worldly men who are walking in the broad way leading to destruction may justly be in fear about their state, but spiritual persons have no reason for believing that they are in the same condition. I do not know whether if they tried to convince themselves of it they could succeed; they could easily believe it a possibility, but that would not necessarily trouble or disturb them. For instance, every man knows that in a single instant he may be surprised by death, but in spite of that, people generally live quite unalarmed, and require some sudden danger to startle them from their tranquility.

But it may be urged who is the man who can deem himself secure against falling into mortal sin? I reply all who do not desire to do so, for to make a sin mortal, perfect consent is necessary, which it is always in our power to refuse as we possess free will.

As to spiritual persons this danger can scarcely be termed a danger regarding them, as not only do they fear mortal sin, but they utterly loathe and detest it.

When they are assailed by temptation or

their natural instincts, if they are not superstitious, and if their minds are in a healthy state, they are neither uneasy or anxious, but despise the whole thing, and pray for help from God; and thus having cast all their care into the bosom of their tender Father, and nothing doubting that He will bring them victoriously out of the conflict, they rest beneath His mighty protection with a joyful and confident peace of heart.

We see then clearly that there are two kinds of fear of God; one a fear which belongs to great sinners who are afraid of His judgments, a fear which is full of terror and anxiety, and quite unbefitting those who are filled with the thought of God's majesty, and detest all that can offend Him; the other a fear which is so strongly inculcated in Scripture, a fear which makes the holy holier still, the more deeply it enters into their hearts. It is this which befits the true servants of God, and is no impediment to joyous familiarity with Him. They ought to have a horror of the other, for it would retard instead of advancing them in spiritual life by making them anxious and perplexed. There should be no mistake in this important matter; in casting out this kind of fear they are only acting in accordance with St. Austin's words:—"Fear," as the holy doctor expresses it, "opens the door of the heart to charity, but once admitted charity

banishes fear, the more charity increases the more fear diminishes." Upon this St. Bonaventura remarks that if charity is opposed to fear, it is only to that fear which is of a hurtful nature, and which is calculated to repel and disturb us, and not that fear which fills us with a great horror of sin, and which purified by charity makes us fly from it with eagerness yet with tranquility. To sum up the whole in a few words, the fear of the Lord spoken of in the Scriptures does not always mean a fear of the Divine judgment ; generally it signifies the deep respect which is due to God, or the dread we should have of aught displeasing to Him, and it is this, as I trust I have sufficiently proved, that is befitting His servants, that of which the royal prophet speaks as belonging to the just. It is not therefore true that the fear of God inculcated by Scripture, can impede or even lessen the liberty of the children of God.

CHAPTER XXX.

Continuation of the same subject.

It is said that a great sinner, after God has pardoned him, should always remember the

past during the whole course of his life, not only to deepen his humility, but to preserve him from falling again ; and that this was the example of the saints. This remembrance must necessarily inspire shame and grief, quite incompatible with joy and liberty ; and, therefore, only they whose lives have ever been pure and innocent, have a right to be familiar with their loving Father.

If there were real grounds for such opinions, there would be nothing but weeping and mourning throughout the whole Church, for everybody would be incessantly thinking about their past sins ; and if great sinners were bitterly bewailing their heavy transgressions, innocent people would be also weeping over their unfaithfulness, and both would be so covered with confusion that they could not hold up their heads. Would this sight be likely to attract the young and thoughtless to a life of virtue, or bring back wandering sinners to the fold ?

But we may comfort ourselves by knowing this is only an imagination. The servants of God ought not to be thinking continually about their past sins. Such a habit produces sad consequences, both as regards body and soul. It presses down the body, and impedes the vital functions, according to St. Thomas, who affirms that, of all mental passions, sadness is the most injurious to health ; it stupi-

fies, tortures, and terrifies the soul, destroying all that vigour and life which springs forth from joy. This is why St. John Chrysostome compares sadness to a corroding ointment, which, when applied to a wound, irritates instead of healing. "Sadness is a humour so bitter and devouring that it may do great harm even to those who require it if they nourish it longer than is necessary." And St. Paul, when he had been sufficiently severe to the sinful Corinthian, was then tender and indulgent towards him, lest, as he says, "he should be swallowed up with over-much sorrow." St. Teresa thinks, that if the remembrance of past sins disquiets a soul, she should as much as possible avoid dwelling upon them, and choose other subjects of meditation, principally those connected with the love of God to man. If the thought of past sins and the sorrow which it inspires is useful to a Christian, there are other holy thoughts which are even more so. The affections which spring from a meditation on divine love, do not only produce humility and hatred of sin, but also zeal in the service of God, contempt for earthly things, and conformity to God's will, even in the smallest matter. The great St. Bernard says: "My friends, I counsel you to leave the painful and narrow way into which the recollection of your past sins leads you, and to enter into the broader road which is opened to you by the

consideration of the goodness of God, that having been, as it were, weighed down by the shame of your transgressions, you may breathe at last in the atmosphere of mercy. Certainly the sorrow for having offended God is useful, if it be not perpetual. Substitute for it from time to time the joyful memory of divine love, lest your hearts should grow hardened beneath the weight of excessive sadness. The just man is his own accuser, not continually, but, as says the Scripture, when he begins to speak to God, while he generally ends his conversation with a hymn of praise." It is clear that the Saint was speaking chiefly to those who had for a long time meditated upon the malice of sin, possessed an indescribable horror for it, and had washed away its stains by tears of true penance. The remembrance of the past was not to them like the sound of a clock which strikes every hour, but rather an awakening voice, which rouses them up if they have been slothful.

Having laid down these principles, I maintain, with St. Thomas, that the virtue of penance, or the determination to hate and avoid sin, ought to be our ever-abiding feeling, so that we ought never to act against it.

As to penance in action, I say that it is very useful to remember our past sins, to mourn over them in the bitterness of our hearts, to grieve because we have offended our Father

and our Creator. Nevertheless, I say that if any one is so rooted in the grace of God and in the resolution of persevering in it, that for some years he has never committed a mortal sin, he will gain more by contemplating and admiring divine love, by praising its immensity, despising all that the world can offer, preferring it to all pleasures and honours, desiring to consecrate himself to it without reserve, and seeking no other reward. What candid mind can deny that such acts are infinitely more useful than a continual sorrow for past sins? Besides, these happy thoughts do not exclude the sorrowful recollection of past sins; on the contrary, the bitter remembrance mingling with their sweetness heightens and increases it, if the recollection does not go beyond a certain point, as we mix salt or bitters with our food to give it a pleasant relish.

What greater delight can a soul loving God experience, than when, prostrate at the feet of her heavenly Spouse, she speaks to Him thus: O God, infinitely worthy of love, whose beauty has ravished my heart! how ungrateful have I been ever to have preferred miserable creatures before Thee! Oh, my tender Father, by how much more I have offended Thee in my past life, by so much will I love Thee for the time to come. And thou, O Lord, the Sovereign Master of the Universe, how is it that Thou

dost deign to look with compassion on a wretched slave, who has been an unworthy traitor towards Thee, and treat him as Thy child and Thy friend, instead of overwhelming him in Thy anger? Who can understand Thy goodness? I cannot admire it enough, nor have I any words in which to speak of it."

You see that such acts, and many others besides, suggested by divine love, do not exclude the remembrance and detestation of past sins, but that nevertheless, as they touch principally upon the goodness of God both in itself and to us, they do not lessen the sweetness of our affections, but render it more thrilling and tender. Such was the conviction of St. Austin when he exclaimed: "That tears shed in time of prayer are more delightful than all the joys of the theatre." I will finish by a quotation from the *Lives of the Fathers of the Desert* about two novices who were penitents. "Both shut themselves up in their own cells, where they bewailed their past sins for a whole year, daily receiving bread and water sufficient to sustain life. When the time of penance was ended they came out of their cells, differing much in personal appearance. One was pale and his eyes were sunken, the other was vigorous, and his face shone like that of an angel. At first every one was surprised at this remarkable difference, but the cause was speedily discovered. When questioned by the

Fathers, as to their meditations during their retreat, the first replied that he had been looking at the wretched state of his soul before his conversion, and was so grieved and horrified that his whole being had suffered. The other declared, that the principal subject of his meditations had been the surpassing goodness with which God had received him back into His friendship, and this had made his heart overflow with consolation." Here you have two models of penance, both hating sin and fighting against it, but after a different fashion—the one bewailing his misery at having fallen into it, the other rejoicing at having been rescued from it. Both endeavour to reform their lives, but not in the same manner: one detests his past life, the other delights in his present state; one continually lamented his malice and his ingratitude towards God, the other was perpetually admiring the goodness of God; the one is always sad, the other always joyful. What do you think of these two penitents, dear reader? Which do you prefer? The holy Fathers from whose lives I have extracted the above, declare that both were equally pleasing to God. Do you agree with them? For my part, I confess I prefer the conduct of the second to the first, and if for no other reason for this: that, being equally pleasing to God, it is besides more natural; for, as a philosopher expresses it, "the same object is better

with pleasure than without pleasure—with joy than with sadness.” I hold particularly to this opinion, because if sadness lasts long it injures both soul and body; whilst, on the contrary, joy may last through our whole life and do us no harm whatever.

CHAPTER XXXI.

General Observations concerning an objection founded upon the example of certain Saints.

THE object of the doctrine laid down in the preceding chapter is not to soften or relax morals, but to impress the beauty of heavenly charity upon the soul, and it is in accordance both with reason and justice. Opponents, therefore, see they cannot overturn it by the weapons of logic, and so they bring forward authority, and point to the conduct of certain canonized saints who spent their lives in continual penance and humility, which is a proof, in their opinion, that they preferred fear and grief to joy and confidence, and that being saints they must have been right. This is the last argument which requires an answer; and this can easily be given. I must first lay

down the generally admitted principle, that in all controversies concerning the greater or lesser goodness of human actions, reason is rather to be consulted than the example of men, these examples being only good or praiseworthy, so far as they are in accordance with reason ; certain examples, therefore, cannot impair the authority of reason. Such, I think, was Tertullian's opinion when he wrote, " Do we approve the faith because of the persons, or the persons because of the faith ?" We ought not to judge the merits of the faith by the conduct of the faithful, but rather the merits of the faithful by their adherence to the faith. Amongst the actions of those illustrious men whom the Church numbers amongst her saints, there are some not only good in themselves, but better than the opposite actions would have been : as, for instance, when they returned good for evil. There are other actions which, though good in themselves, are not better than their opposites ; for instance, the reservation of property in order to relieve the poor, instead of the entire relinquishment of it at once by the vow of poverty. There are others, again, of which it may be doubted whether their nature is good : as, for instance, to pretend madness under the plea of humility ; others which cannot be praised in themselves or under general circumstances, because they were performed under the influence of a particular

inspiration, such as the giving up of oneself to the persecutors of the Church in order to die for the faith. Again, there are occasionally actions recorded in the lives of certain saints which are bad in themselves: for instance, the dispute between the apostles as to which should be the greater, and the lies recorded of some of the Fathers of the Desert.

As therefore the actions of the saints are not all perfect, nor even all good, by what rule can we judge of them? I know no other than that of reason, as I said before. It is not enough to be sure that an action is holy because it is recorded of a saint; we must examine beside whether it accords with sanctity. If any one therefore says such a saint did so and so, therefore it was right, and whoever does not do so does wrong, or at least does less rightly, will reason falsely.

But you may say of what use then is the example of the saints, if we cannot form a right judgment about them without reason, while reason can guide us safely without them. But this I deny; and I affirm, that even if the actions recorded do not teach us to distinguish what is laudable from what is more laudable, at least they encourage us to do what we know to be pleasing to God, fervently and with a pure intention. No one can read the wonderful things recorded of the saints, without being ashamed to see how meagre his virtues are

compared with theirs, how feeble his zeal in doing good !

With such numberless examples before him can any one pretend that the weakness of his nature is an obstacle to sanctity ? Is he not confounded by the question to which St. Austin before his conversion could find no reply : “ Canst thou not do what so many others have done ? ”

And thus a Christian by the consideration of what the saints have been and of what he is himself, is led to follow and imitate them. Besides inspiring the desire of emulating them, the example of the saints gives us light by which we can easily discern what is good and what is better ; first, when we are uncertain as to whether an action is good, we may generally believe it to be so, if it is common to one or more saints, for as the saints are accustomed to practice virtue, we should look on it as good and worthy of imitation, unless it is evidently bad. I say good and worthy of imitation, not perfect, and so necessary that we cannot omit it under pain of sin ; for though we may believe that the saints in general acted perfectly, we need not conclude that every individual action was perfect. Secondly, when reason demonstrates a given action as probably but not certainly good, the practice of one or more saints gives it a much higher degree of probability, without however proving a contrary

action to be bad or less praiseworthy. Thirdly, when we find that not one alone but nearly all the saints have followed a certain kind of life, their universal example clearly not only shows it to be good but excellent and necessary. For instance, even if no other reason established the necessity of corporal mortification, the example of all the saints would leave us no room to doubt it.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Answer to the same objection.

HAVING given this necessary explanation I will now answer the objection. It is said that many saints have attained perfection by the way of fear and penance. Therefore it must be the path to follow and every other one must be dangerous. Who can believe this? I certainly cannot, neither will you, dear reader, unless you consider that everything done by certain saints is praiseworthy, perfect, and even necessary to salvation, an idea which I trust I have already proved to be entirely false. But I can go further still and appeal to the examples of the saints themselves as proving nothing against my teaching, but rather defending and

strengthening it. Has not the Church been filled with holy persons who attained perfection by this very confidence and liberty of spirit which I am trying to impress on you? Supposing therefore that I take the same position as my opponents, and say many saints have become perfect through their loving familiarity with God, therefore this path is not only a sure and safe one, but we must all follow it, what answer can they give without contradicting themselves? They must either admit that it is a safe and sure path, because many saints have trod in it, and yet that it is neither safe nor sure because many saints have trod in another; or else they will be obliged to confess that though some saints have served God in weeping and trembling, others have also served Him in joy and confidence, and that the latter are the more numerous.

Besides, if we take certain solitaries and contemplatives as our only examples, we should condemn those apostolic men who labour for the salvation of souls, nay, even Our Lord Himself, and all those who have followed an active or the mixed life instead of entire contemplation. We should thus be perplexed throughout our lives by these different examples.

I may then draw this reasonable conclusion :
1st. There are various paths in the spiritual life. 2nd. Those who follow these different

roads by inspiration from God, can equally attain perfection as we see in the examples of canonized saints. They were separated during their journey through life, but they all met together at its close, and the various means which they had used had led them all to eminent sanctity.

Let us take care then never to find fault with those who follow a different path from our own. And still more let us take care not to be discontented with our own vocation, because persons of great sanctity have been called to other states of life. Finally, let us be on our guard against running after various kinds of perfection, first one way then another, now here, now there, imitating some saint or another according to our fancy. It is far better to consider which path is best for our spiritual advancement, and to prefer it to all others.

Is not this the rule given by the Apostle St. Paul? In his first Epistle to the Corinthians, he enumerates the various vocations and gifts which Almighty God bestows upon His servants, thus: "firstly, Apostles; secondly, prophets; thirdly, doctors; after that miracles, then the graces of healing, helps, governments, kinds of tongues, interpretations of speeches," and then he asks, "Are all Apostles, are all prophets, are all doctors?" etc., meaning thereby that every one should be content with his own peculiar vocation or gift. And then he

gives this remarkable advice, "But be zealous for the better way. And I show unto you a yet more excellent way." What is this more excellent way? He points it out immediately afterwards, "*the way of Divine charity.*" Is not that the way I have pointed out to you when I have recommended you to prefer love to fear, unless a particular inspiration of God leads you differently? But you must not think that he who follows this way is more perfect than he who follows another, for it is evident that the holiness of a man is not to be measured by the state he is in, but by his life; as Cassian says, "It is better to be devout in an inferior vocation than indevout in one which is higher."

Certainly the religious state is much more perfect than the secular; and yet there are people who live holier lives in the world than some religious in their communities. If two travellers going to the same town, take one the shorter the other the longer road, it is evident that the former ought to reach his destination first; but sometimes this is not the case, either because the second walks the faster or lingers less on his way. Thus though the way of Divine love is shorter and easier than that of fear, it may happen that some who have pursued the former, have, from their want of courage, made less progress than others who have followed the latter, and have attained a high degree of sanctity. But it is not the less

true, that if the latter had trodden in the path of Divine love with the same good will, they would equally have attained sanctity, and even in a more eminent degree. You ask what you ought to do when you find some saint advising you to follow the path of fear which he has pursued, and which he thinks is the safest? You ought still to pursue the way of love and confidence, if experience tells you it has been good for you. I will give my reasons for saying this. There are certain passages in Holy Scripture which ought to be prudently interpreted, otherwise they contradict acknowledged rules of conduct, and even other words spoken by the Holy Ghost. The same may be said of counsels to be found in the writings of the saints. As we have already seen, many saints recommend us to be familiar and confiding with God. But this way of acting is certainly not fitting for all, and we must take care not to advise every one to accept it. We must interpret this counsel prudently, and say that it is not suitable for those in mortal sin, for those who have inordinate attachments, and for those who have made no progress in humility.

Again, there are other saints who recommend fear and sorrow, and seem to disapprove of the joys of Divine love; their opinion also must be wisely interpreted, else it would seem to contradict the practice and example of many

other saints. Francis Stadiera truly remarks that some saints and even Fathers of the Church, when treating of a subject do not always speak of it in the same manner, or from the same point of view. They sometimes speak of salvation as easy of attainment, at others, as of the utmost difficulty, according to the various times and places in which they wrote, or persons to whom they spoke. Readers should remember this, and thus reconcile statements which appear to differ instead of rashly accusing them of inconsistency.

Besides, each saint, while imbued with the spirit of the Church, has his own peculiar spirit; just as each member of the body, besides partaking of the form of the whole, has its own peculiar shape; and their peculiar spirit leads them to adopt certain spiritual practices in preference to others, and advise their followers to do the same. We also have each our own peculiar spirit, and it would lead us in a different path. Are we to silence it, and listen to the voice of another? If so we should be very unwise, and be like children carried about by every wind. Let each follow his own *attrait* without troubling himself about what he may read in the Lives of the Saints, convinced, as St. Paul says, "that all things are lawful, but all things are not expedient," and in our Father's house "there are many mansions." We should each have a great es-

teem for our own vocation, and we may speak highly of it as the saints did, provided we take heed never to disparage a different vocation, remembering that Cassian says, "There are several roads that lead to God."

We find an illustration of what we have been saying, in the lesson given by our Lord to His beloved spouse St. Gertrude. Some of her sisters in religion went to Holy Communion with timidity and trembling respect, instead of the joyful confidence with which she was filled ; she was displeased, and found fault with them rather severely. Her Divine Spouse reproved her saying, "My daughter, you forget that if My goodness ought to be acknowledged by love, reverence for my greatness is no less due to Me." If possible, we should never separate these two feelings, and as our weak human nature prevents this, they should act together like members of the same body, one doing what it cannot of itself by the aid of the other. If any one is so carried away by the strength of love that he is less full of reverence than others, he should rejoice that others are more intent upon giving God this reverence, and in return he should pray that they may taste the consolations of unitive love.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

On the sweet and joyous confidence recommended in Scripture.

SPIRITUAL joy is, as its name denotes, the joy which the heart of man experiences in the possession and enjoyment of spiritual gifts. He is joyful because he knows that God has deigned to call him His friend and His child, that he lives under the protection of the Most High, and that he hopes soon to be united to God his Father in eternal bliss. All those who follow the path of perfection are in this state; and as there are no riches to be compared to those they possess, they ought to be the most joyful of mankind. And yet many are not so, and few are so always, because they do not sufficiently consider what cause for joy they possess. I feel an interest in them; and as all they need is to know their own happiness, I wish to draw their attention to it, to induce them to remember what they are—children and friends of God and heirs of His kingdom. This beautiful subject is always fruitful, and it will confirm the truths I have been speaking of, and show still more clearly how mistaken people are in thinking that humility is always sad—who look on the joy which the servants of God experience as pre-

sumption, and try to disturb them by putting fear into their hearts. This mistake arises from a want of discernment in confounding worldly happiness with that divine and supernatural joy which, having infinite good for its object, can never be too great, and which becomes more and more perfect as we know God more. The blessed ones in heaven experience this ; and if I can persuade any one to believe this truth, either from reason or authority, I am certain they also will understand it. There is not a word in Holy Scripture which forbids the servants of God to rejoice in Him. It is true Solomon said, "that the heart of the wise is where there is mourning, and the heart of the fools where there is mirth ;" but he evidently meant to praise a wise gravity and modesty, and to blame frivolity and dissipation. As for spiritual joy, I should never end if I were to quote all the passages of Holy Writ which praise it. I will merely mention some of the most striking. David speaks most beautifully of it, sometimes declaring it to be the heritage of God's servants : sometimes entreating the Lord to infuse it into his soul for his nourishment and delight. At one time he proclaims the blessedness of those who have drank at its source ; at another he invites all the just to rejoice in the Lord : The just shall rejoice in the Lord. Let Israel rejoice in Him that made

him, and let the children of Sion be joyful in their King. The saints shall rejoice in glory: they shall be joyful in their beds. O how great is the multitude of Thy sweetness, O Lord, which Thou hast hidden from them that fear Thee! Give joy to the soul of Thy servant, for to Thee, O Lord, I have lifted up my soul: for Thou, O Lord, art sweet, and mild, and plenteous in mercy to all that call upon Thee. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation. Blessed is the people that knoweth jubilation: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance, and in Thy name shall they rejoice all the day. Glory ye in His holy Name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord. Serve ye the Lord with gladness: come before His presence with exceeding great joy. O taste and see that the Lord is sweet: blessed is the man that hopeth in Him. Come let us praise the Lord with joy: let us joyfully sing to God our Saviour. Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice ye just, and glory all ye right of heart.

After the holy King comes Solomon, who says of sadness: "As a moth doth by a garment and a worm by the wood, so the sadness of a man consumeth the heart;" and of joy: "I have known that there was no better thing than to rejoice." And again: "The joyfulness of the heart is the life of a man, and a never-failing treasure of holiness, and the joy

of a man is length of life ; and again : " Give not up thy soul to sadness, and afflict not thyself in thy own counsel . . . for sadness hath killed many, and there is no profit in it."

St. Peter and St. Paul treat the subject in the same manner. The former, in his First Epistle, exhorts the faithful, " as new-born babes, to desire the rational milk without guile," " if so be," he adds, " you have tasted that the Lord is sweet." And this Cardinal Hugues interprets : " You will have this ardent desire if you have already learned the grandeur and the beauty of divine sweetness." St. Paul strongly urges his converts to preserve interior joy as their only defence against sadness and scrupulosity. " Now the God of Hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing," he writes to the Romans ; and to the Colossians : " Let the peace of Christ rejoice in your hearts ;" to the Philippians : " May the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds, through Jesus Christ." To the Galatians, enumerating the fruits of the Spirit, he mentions, first : Charity, joy, and peace ; to the Thessalonians : " Always rejoice ;" and again to the Philippians : " Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice." Once more to the same body of Christians : " My brethren, rejoice in the Lord : to write the same things to you, to me indeed is not wearisome, but to you is necessary."

And to this convincing evidence we may add the authority of our divine Lord, When the Pharisees censured in His presence the joy of the apostles, he replied : " Can the children of the Bridegroom mourn as long as the Bridegroom is with them ? " Fear not, therefore, ye whom He has espoused in love, to displease Him by your joy. Has He not said besides : " Rejoice in this, that your names are written in heaven." And again : " Be glad and rejoice, for behold your reward is great in heaven."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

The eminent advantages of spiritual joy.

If you consider the eminent advantages arising from spiritual joy, you will not be surprised Holy Writ so highly exalts it. First, it leads us to despise worldly pleasures. How can a soul who has tasted the sweetness of heavenly consolation regret the flesh-pots of Egypt ? I mean by this those natural satisfactions which a man cannot renounce if he has not far greater joys in their place. St. Gregory says : " The soul cannot live without enjoyment." If it has none it is in an unnatural state, like an animal

without reason ; and, therefore, if a man knows nothing of interior happiness, he necessarily falls back upon earthly pleasures. And thus, worldly men, who are ignorant of the spiritual life, cannot free themselves from sensuality, while spiritual persons, who have tasted that the Lord is sweet, can easily overcome it. "Behold St. Peter on Mount Thabor," says St. Austin ; "he looks with contempt on all vain pleasures here below." His Master's glory makes him believe himself already in heaven. He has drunk but one drop of the heavenly nectar, and he cries out in a transport : "Lord, it is good for us to be here ; let us make here three tabernacles." The great St. Anthony taught his disciples that the habitual thought of God and the joy it brings was their best defence against the deceits of the devil.

Satan is dismayed when he sees a servant of God happy and rejoicing with his Divine Master, he does not know in what way to attack him or with what snares to draw him, and he gives up the struggle in shame and confusion. But when he encounters a soul beaten down by trouble and depression he boldly confronts her, pointing out on one side the sufferings of a spiritual life, on the other the pleasures of the world, never relaxing his efforts, but constantly bringing before her eyes every sort of temptation, till her unhappiness is so increased

that she is in great danger of falling. St. John Chrysostom says that great depression is one of the devil's weapons most to be dreaded. "Those whom the devil overthrows," he writes, "are overthrown by sadness, and if you deprive him of this weapon he can no longer harm you."

What stronger motive can a spiritual person need for driving away depression as he would Satan himself. The means to use are to remember that he is the well beloved child of God, and his tender Father is preparing for him glory which shall never end. These thoughts will fill him with joy and confidence, and he will cry out with St. Austin, "Let others seek their happiness where they will, for me, I will seek it only in the Lord, the Lord is the portion of my inheritance."

The second advantage of spiritual joy is to fortify the soul, so that it eagerly and joyfully strives to attain perfection like unto the royal prophet, who declares "I have run the way of Thy commandments when Thou didst enlarge my heart." But our own experience tells us that a joyful heart knows no obstacle, and that instead of a spur it rather requires a bridle to moderate its zeal in the service of God. And when we are beaten down by depression we lose all heart and courage in well doing; the smallest difficulty dismays us, and the mere thought of working for God is a

weariness ; we can hardly drag one foot after the other, and feel that at every step we must stop for breath. St. Ambrose truly says that the sweetness of the yoke of Christ consists in bearing it joyfully and gaily, and that it is light to those who rejoice, and heavy to those who are sad. His words are : "The yoke of Christ may appear heavy, the weight of the law is considered, but the help of grace, the hope of heaven, and the joy of a pure conscience make it light and pleasant." The prophet Ezechiel tells us of mysterious wheels which he beheld in vision that followed the spirit wherever it went, and lifted up when the spirit was lifted up, for the spirit of life was in the wheels. St. Thomas of Villanova explains this vision by telling us that these wheels typify souls, filled through and through with the unction of the Holy Ghost, who run and fly whithersoever the spirit impels them towards perfection. The unction of the Holy Ghost means that joy which He infuses into the heart.

We read in the book of the Machabees that the soldiers of the Lord fought with great joy, and thus gained many signal victories. And we too should be victorious if we fought joyfully against the enemies of our salvation and of our Divine Master. When that valiant Apostle St. Andrew was told he was to die on a cross, instead of being terrified he ran towards it, and

embracing it cried out, "Hail cross, so long desired and at length granted, I meet you with joy and tranquillity." "From whence proceeded this wonderful and unconquerable strength?" asks St. Bernard, "Was it not from the sweetness of the Holy Spirit which filled his heart?" Ah, if it were shed abroad in our hearts how it would strengthen us. We ought to look on penance as St. Andrew looked on his cross, and then instead of being dismayed at it, we shall long for it, it will become delightful. "My spirit," says the Lord, "is sweeter than honey, and the bitterness of death cannot touch it." What is there then which this unction will not sweeten if it can rob death of its powers? Surely there can be no pain that it will not soften, if it can make the last hours of life sweet to us.

The third advantage of spiritual joy is to give a higher perfection and greater merit to our good works.

We all know that what is done with attention and fervour is generally more perfect and more meritorious. The seraphic doctor says what we do with joy is always done with attention and fervour. He reasons thus: "He who finds pleasure in what he does is not distracted by surrounding things, as he is who acts under pressure or with a sorrowful heart." The former never grudges time or labour in his undertakings, like the man who enjoying some

food keeps it in his mouth to enjoy the taste ; while he would swallow down a bitter medicine very quickly ; or again like a workman who has chosen his trade and delights in it, and who makes much greater progress than if he had been forced to work at it. St. Gregory Nazianzen tells us, that the Athenians before fixing on a profession for their sons, spread out before them the implements of the various arts, that the young men might choose whichever they liked best. "Never," says St. Thomas, "is what we perform with a sad heart as well done as what we take pleasure in." If we wish our actions to be pleasing to God, we must perform them with good will and joy of heart. "How could I please the Lord in the ceremonies having a sorrowful heart ?" says Aaron in Holy Scripture, and have we not seen in Ecclesiasticus that the Lord loves those who serve Him joyfully ?

The fourth advantage of spiritual joy is, to increase the love of God and our neighbour in us ; love expands the heart and fills it with sweetness, and therefore it is clear that joy is a greater help to love than sadness. But we are now speaking of spiritual joy only, and we see clearly it entirely originates from the love of God and of heavenly things. As the fire inflames the wood we heap on it, so does joy increase and preserve the very love that created it. Reason and experience both teach us this

truth ; if we watch those who have given themselves up to serve our dear Lord with joy, we shall see how easily and lovingly they comply with the inspirations of Divine charity, how they make themselves universally beloved from their readiness to oblige, their gracious manners, their patience in bearing with the faults of others, and their tenderness towards the miserable and needy. And if we look at the melancholy and discontented can there be a more displeasing contrast ? Their manners are repelling, their harsh way of speaking closes the hearts of others, they have no mercy for other people's weakness, they are inclined to anger, jealousy, and unjust suspicion, they see evil everywhere, are always complaining, and wear every one out by their perverse behaviour. This made St. Lawrence Justinian say : " That sadness could not dwell with holy cheerfulness ; if the latter encounters the former sadness disappears, or loses all that the latter gains, for it is certain that God does not approve of sadness since He has so highly extolled her rival charity.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Examples of the good effects of holy joy.

THAT I may show still more clearly the advantages of spiritual joy, I will quote two examples from the life of Father Nicolas Zucci, who died in the odour of sanctity. A nun who had a great desire to lead a more perfect life, said to Father Zucci : " How, Father, can I become a saint ?" The servant of God, who well knew the importance of spiritual joy, replied in the words of the Psalm : " Delight in the Lord and He will give thee the requests of thy heart." " Make God," he added, " the principle of your joy ; make it a pleasure to do all that you know will please Him ; let His presence and His service become your only consolation, your sole rejoicing, all your happiness." After having repeated this advice several times, Father Zucci went away, trusting that God would bring the precious seed he had sown to perfection. Some years later this nun being on her death bed sent for a priest to give her the last sacraments. As this priest could not come, Father Zucci was asked to take his place. The nun was overjoyed at seeing him again, and to recall herself to his remembrance repeated the words of the Psalm he had sug-

gested to her as the true way of becoming a saint. "Certainly, Father," said the dying Religious, "I have not become a saint from my own negligence, yet still in comparison with what I was before I followed your salutary counsel I seem to be one." She then told him the number of extraordinary graces she had received since she had learned to rejoice in the Lord, and having thanked the father for the service he had rendered her, she gently passed away from earth, in loving converse with her Lord.

The second example is that of a young man who also sent for Father Zucchi to attend him in his last illness. As the latter came into the room, he cried out, "O, Father, how much I owe you, eight months ago I came to you for advice as to my spiritual advancement; you told me to remember and to faithfully practice the injunction of the Apostle, 'to rejoice in the Lord.' I may say, Father, of this blessed advice what Solomon did of wisdom, 'that all things that can be desired are not to be compared to it.' I should never finish if I were to tell all the good it has done to my soul. Read this paper on which I have written some of the graces I owe to it." Father Zucchi took the journal, and preserved it carefully as a memorial of the goodness of God towards those who serve Him in joy; he read it over from time to time, and it always gave him sweet

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As, therefore, Holy Scripture exhorts us strongly to rejoice in the Lord, as reason and experience both teach us that it is a great help to spiritual progress, no one surely will in future censure this holy joy in the servants of God, or assert that it leads to presumption, and hinders compunction, penance, and mortifications which form other solid virtues. If such were the effects of joy in the Lord, would the Holy Ghost have inculcated it? Could He not foresee what would be its results? And supposing for a moment spiritual joy did expose us to these dangers, have we not proved that sadness has its evils also, not few and far between, like those of joy, but many, near at hand, and inevitable, because they belong to its very nature? Prudence does not consist in avoiding every difficulty, else there would be no prudent path in spiritual life, for there is none which does not contain some stumbling blocks, or where some wayfarer has not fallen. Prudence consists in choosing that path of salvation where the difficulties are counter-balanced by the greatest number of advantages, such as that of joy and confidence instead of fear and terror. What advantages can be found indeed in the latter? "We learn to weep over our sins," you say, "we humble ourselves at their recollection." Well, there is a danger

in this. It will lead to discouragement and weariness in well doing, hope will grow weak, charity will grow cold, we shall be lukewarm and cowardly in our actions. But none of this will spring from holy joy, while it will bestow on us many advantages. How easy it is to resist sensuality, to overcome the difficulties in spiritual life, to love prayer, and zealously practise all the Christian virtues. It is true that joy may lead to presumption and an over great security, and to thinking that devotion consists in sensible consolations, which would be a fatal delusion ; yet it would be unreasonable to relinquish the many advantages which it confers on us, because there are dangers attending it, which can be easily avoided. That great master of spirituality, St. Lawrence Justinian, tells us that it is safer and wiser to choose joy rather than sadness for our constant companion in the service of God, because that service obliges us to make war against our inclinations and feelings, to struggle against our own weakness, the assaults of the devil, and the world, and we therefore greatly need spiritual joy to support us in all our difficulties. It is most pleasing to God and true prudence, he continues, that a just man, groaning under the burden of his miserable nature, tempted by devils, persecuted by men, worried by the cares of this life, and having perpetually to fight against sensuality, should strive after holy joy

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as his greatest help in the path of life. And this is indeed a Divine counsel, for God has said by the mouth of the royal prophet, "Serve ye the Lord with gladness;" and joy is certainly befitting those to whom is promised the company of angels, the possession of heavenly glory, and the Beatific Vision.

He then spoke to his religious in these words: "O servant of Jesus Christ, whom He has called to the monastic life, lay aside all sadness, all depression and sorrow, and rejoice for ever in the Lord, who has withdrawn you from the world, preserved you from the universal shipwreck, and brought you into a place of safety, happiness and peace; our gracious God has deigned to lead you from the darkness of sin into the light of His grace, to number you amongst His friends that you may proclaim His praise, He has taught you the secrets of His unsearchable wisdom, He has promised you in His infinite goodness the highest places in His kingdom. O how blessed are you. I cannot too often repeat, 'serve ye the Lord with gladness,' it will enable you to serve Him with more zeal, to run more swiftly in the way of His commandments, to become more pleasing in His eyes by increasing your love and gratitude. I repeat, therefore, for all these reasons, serve the Lord with gladness." Divine love and spiritual joy are so bound together, that one is scarcely ever to be found without

the other, and the greater the love that fills the heart the greater also the joy. Clement of Alexandria says, that the life of the just is a perpetual rejoicing. It is true that all the friends of God do not outwardly manifest this joy which is their peculiar possession, though many amongst them have had it, as it were, imprinted on their countenances. Of these frequent examples occur among the Fathers of the desert, where we might least have expected to meet with them; of St. Pacomius it is written, that though worn by his austerities he had always a joyful countenance, and of St. Romuald, the founder of the rigid Camaldolesi, the Roman Breviary records that the serenity of his countenance gladdened all who saw him.

Palladius, who was an eye witness, tells us the Abbot Theonas lived thirty years in a separate cell, and he kept continual silence, but his eyes were sparkling with joy and his face was bright as that of an angel.

St. Athanasius declares that the great St. Anthony, the founder of the monastic order, could be distinguished among a crowd of his disciples by the extraordinary joyousness of his countenance; every one who visited him went away full of consolation and gladness, and he was so filled with joy that the memory of past sin could never sadden him. In the community of the celebrated Apollonius, of five hundred monks, it was impossible, we learn, to

find any signs of melancholy or discontent amongst them. Their superior was ever exhorting them to rejoice, telling them that none should be sad who awaited the salvation of God and His heavenly kingdom. Pagans might be miserable, Jews might mourn, and sinners might eat their bread with weeping, but the just ought to rejoice. If worldly men found such joy in riches and pleasures, ought not those who look forward to a blessed eternity to be still more joyful. The Apostle has told us to "rejoice always." Thus did these great saints and other holy servants of God reason. May God grant that we may imitate them, that we may strive to rejoice and to show our joy, both for our own sakes and for the edification of others. The human mind is naturally inclined to joy, and turns away instinctively from sadness and melancholy. Nothing prejudices people so much against religion than the gloomy ideas they have about it; they think that to enter on the spiritual life, is to bid farewell to smiles and gladness for ever. They are greatly astonished when they meet with a servant of God who looks happy and contented, and whose conversation is bright and pleasant. Their prejudices are dispelled, they admire Christian perfection. If they see pious people melancholy, and are treated by them in a rude, discourteous way, they are scandalized and repelled. Seneca

strongly recommended urbanity in language and manners to his disciples, "otherwise," he says, "we shall disgust those whom we should otherwise gain, and force them to fly away from us." Two preachers may equally desire to lead their hearers into the spiritual life, but they adopt very different means. One draws a melancholy picture of the journey as full of difficulties and dangers; the anger of God, the recollection of past sins, the difficulty of repentance, the small number of the elect, are his favourite topics. The other represents it as sweet and easy, and says that those who follow it are the happiest of human beings. He tells them God is their good Father, and His kingdom their future inheritance; and these thoughts are in themselves a foretaste of future bliss.

Does not the one act as God does when He wishes to save souls, and the other like the devil when he wishes to destroy them? Imitate then the great enemy of man by preaching melancholy and sadness if you like. But for me, I will rather exhort them to have confidence and joy, after the example of my Divine Master.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

This spiritual joy is in accordance with certain passages of Holy Scripture which at first sight appear to contradict it.

WE have now only to consider those passages of Holy Writ which at first sight appear to disapprove of spiritual joy. "Blessed are they that mourn," said our divine Master. "Amen, amen, I say to you, that you shall lament and weep, but the world shall rejoice," He said again to His disciples. "I am become miserable, and am bowed down even to the end. I walk sorrowful all the day long," are the words of King David. "I have great sadness and continual sorrow in my heart," writes St. Paul.

I answer, 1st, in Holy Scripture the words weeping, mourning, sadness, and the like, are often applied to the causes of such emotions, such as persecutions, imprisonments, and similar calamities, which usually bring sorrow to the minds of those who suffer them. It is in this sense that we must understand our Lord's prediction: "You shall lament and weep, but the world shall rejoice"—that is, the world shall taste of all the pleasures that life offers, whilst you shall suffer. And again His

words, "Blessed are they that mourn," are interpreted much in the same manner by St. Peter Chrysologus. In his explanation of the 94th Psalm, which begins, "Come let us praise the Lord with joy: let us joyfully sing to God our Saviour," he asks how such an invitation can accord with our Lord's words, "Blessed are ye that weep now, for you shall laugh:" "Woe to you that now laugh, for you shall mourn and weep?" and he replies the true meaning is: "Blessed are those who have no part in the vain joys of the world, and woe to those who share in them." It is easy to reconcile holy joy with this kind of sadness. Sufferings which merely affect the body or the feelings do not touch that joy which fills the superior part of the soul; on the contrary, they rather increase it. The more the saints suffered exteriorly the greater was their interior joy. It was sometimes so great that they forgot entirely all their miseries.

I answer, 2ndly, that I have never wished to condemn every kind of sadness. There is a sadness which is befitting and praiseworthy in the servants of God. I approve instead of blaming them, for mourning over their sins, for, according to St. Paul, it will lead to true penance. The apostle and the law of divine charity tell us to weep with those that weep. The royal Prophet shows us how we should mourn over our earthly exile. "Woe is me

that my sojourning is prolonged ;” and again : “ My tears have been my bread day and night, whilst it is said to me daily, Where is thy God ?” But this sort of sadness does not hinder that spiritual joy which I have tried to teach you. Mere feelings of joy and sorrow may not exist at the same time, but the joy and sorrow of the understanding and the will are in perfect accordance with each other. I will go further still, and say, with St. Thomas, that this sadness may be the source of fresh joy in the will, because it is for our good, and because it recalls a beloved object to our memory.

Let us apply this rule to the three different kinds of sadness of which we have spoken, and we shall easily understand how they can increase joy instead of destroying it.

As regards the first : Sorrow about past sins—the remembrance of past sins. This is in reality an antidote to sadness, for, as St. John Climaticus says : “ When I consider the force of compunction I am astonished to find what interior joy and consolation it produces instead of grief or sadness.”

Far from being astonished at this, we have the strongest reasons for believing there is great satisfaction in true and saintly sorrow. Its principal, or, rather, only motive is the goodness of God. A sorrow for sin is more pleasing to God than all other creatures, and

the memory of our faults reminds us of the mercy our good Master has shown in pardoning them. The more unhappy we were while at enmity with God, the more we appreciate the happiness of being in His grace. And all this is so full of consolation that our sorrow becomes inexpressibly sweet to us.

Then there is the sorrow we feel at the sight of our suffering brethren ; but whether we look at it as a supernatural or meritorious act, or as an exercise of divine charity, it is certainly seasoned with holy joy. If we hear or read of some sorrowful event, it gives us a feeling of compassion which is a sort of pleasure, and the greater the compassion the greater the pleasure.

And then there is the sorrow felt by God's servants, who are weary of their long exile from Him, who long to see His Beauty, whose certain hope of contemplating His glory has inflamed their hearts with desires for that happy day. This sorrow is full of divine love, and it fills their souls with happiness. Tears do indeed become a delicious food for them, and they can say, with the royal Prophet, "Tears have been my bread day and night," while the fire of divine love is stirred up within them by the daily question, "Where is now your God?"

I must however observe that though this sorrow is mingled with consolation and there-

fore compatible with spiritual joy, it ought not to be so continual as to prevent the far greater happiness and peace of Divine love. I am mistaken ; this is not my advice, but that of St. Lawrence Justinian, who says the soul that loves God, grieves for her sins, not on her own account, but because she has been so ungrateful to her Beloved, and that she afflicts herself in order to appease Him, and to induce Him to return to her, knowing that it is her faults which have made Him depart from her. He adds that this sorrow should only last as long as God is absent from the soul ; when she feels He is within her again, she should lay aside what He calls her mourning garment, assume the garb of rejoicing, and hasten to greet Him with a glad countenance. St. Francis Assisi was of the same opinion ; he once rebuked one of his religious for looking sad, telling him that nothing but sin ought to make God's servants melancholy, and then only till it was forgiven.

Therefore, dear reader, if your conscience reproaches you with some great fault, turn to God for pardon, as King David did, and then say, " restore unto me Thy salvation."

But especially after our slight daily faults, we should make it a rule after an act of contrition to be as cheerful as before. For as we daily commit many faults of this kind, if we devote a long time to repenting for each of them, we should not have a moment to spare

for conversing with God in joy and peace of heart.

It is possible that sorrow for our ordinary venial faults, as well as for our past sins, may last too long and be too excessive, if it brings mistrust and fear into the soul. The hermit Maro, in his treatise on Paradise, says there are two sorts of contrition, the one good and salutary, enlightening and tranquilizing the mind, the other most injurious because it causes disgust. The servants of God cannot take too much care in avoiding this latter kind of contrition, because their progress in the spiritual life depends greatly upon the peace of their souls. "If they are wise, they will," says Cassian, "sorrow for their sins in a quiet peaceful way, and unite it to holy joy and hope. And this sorrow should spring from a love of God, and we should have great confidence in Him. If any one, therefore, will walk in the path of Divine love, though he may mourn over his sins, and over the sorrows of others, he will be always happy and joyful. He should be careful to make his meditations generally on subjects which are likely to expand his heart and animate his courage, such as the infinite loveliness of God, His unspeakable goodness towards us, and the glory he has prepared for us in the life to come. If occasionally his mind is turned towards subjects which are sad and melancholy, they will be consoling

to him, because their bitterness will make the daily nourishment of his soul more delightful to his taste ; a joy that never varies, and which is never mixed with sorrow, loses its charm, and becomes insipid, as it is said " Satiety breeds contempt." There is a striking instance of this in the Jewish nation. God rained down manna from Heaven on them for forty years. It was a delicious food, because it was adapted to the taste of each person who ate it ; but, however, the people grew weary of it, because it was always the same ; they dared to say to God, " Our soul is dry, our eyes behold nothing but manna." And now in conclusion, I say to you in the words of the Apostle, " May the God of hope fill you with all joy and hope in believing, that you may abound in hope and in the power of the Holy Ghost."

THE END.

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